THE PRIVATE LIFE OF AN EMINENT POLITICIAN

BY EDOUARD ROD

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(Rendered into English from "La Vie Privée de Michel Teissier")

BY

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PART I.

They were waiting in the little sitting-room on the ground floor. It was the least pretentious room in the whole house, and yet the one that Suzanne loved the best, for it contained the only remaining scraps of furniture left from old days. They were not in the best taste, perhaps—the tall cupboard with the gilt pillars, the divan, the old-fashioned arm-chairs, the still more old-fashioned table. Long ago, when they lived in a modest flat in the Rue de la Pompe, these few things had been bought a bargain, and bit by bit at auction-rooms, by Michael himself, and they had placed them proudly in his working-room. In those days they were their grandest possessions. Now they were hidden away in this room, where only the family, or very intimate friends, were admitted; and brand-new "suites," ordered ready-made, from a fashionable

upholsterer, adorned the two floors of the large private house with stables and coach-house, in the Rue St. George, that the Teissiers had occupied for the last three years. They had continued their simple ways as long as possible; but, when their means became ampler, thanks to a legacy, and Michael's position grew gradually more important, they were obliged to enlarge their way of living. As Vice-President of the Chamber, and on the high-road to becoming a minister, he had to resign himself to going into society and to receiving it at his own house, and in many ways to live more showily. But to Suzanne these dear old bits of furniture were full of memories which made her love them. They reminded her of the days when, at least for the few hours of leisure that he snatched from his profession, her Michael was entirely her own. He was a journalist, beginning to be well-known, and therefore very busy. He had a large share, also, in the management of a thriving paper, "*Order*," to which his success was in no small degree due, and in which even still he had a considerable interest. They recalled to her the first rapturous happiness of a love-match—an imprudent one, perhaps,—between him, a very young, and poor, man, with no assured future, and her, a girl, scarcely more than a child, with no

dowry but her courage and love. They recalled to her all the little tender details of the passionate love and almost jealous exclusiveness of those first six, childless, years. They recalled still to her the novel enjoyment of their ampler means, and the long hours that followed her timid confession to her pleased and happy husband, of what filled her with fear and pain, and yet tender joy. They reminded her of an illness of Annie's, their eldest girl, and then of a long nursing of Michael, through a disease in which the doctor gave him up, but where love, more than skill, won the day. Yes: they reminded her, not only of these, but of graver matters: those dark, or bright threads that, mingling, weave the pattern on the woof of Life, and then gradually fade into the blurred, half tints of Time. They told her of days sometimes good, sometimes bad; mostly good on the whole, because beautified by love. Suzanne already began to live more in regrets than hopes, and to feel, with a sort of blind instinct, that the years gone by were better than those that were to come. There were so many things now that diverted Michael's love from her! It was, no doubt, still warm enough to resist the growing encroachment of business, and keep his strong character proof against any vicissitudes of fortune. Yet, things were not quite the same.

She saw less and less of him now. The sort of life they led made it so. He had his part to play, his paper to edit, his party to lead, and his schemes to carry out, for the "moral regeneration" of his country, as he called it, and to which he had given himself up, heart and soul. True, his wife approved his work, encouraged him in it, and loved him all the more for it. But still it took him away from her. She had to share him with his constituents, his colleagues, his opponents, his friends, his dependents, his admirers, male and even female. For women were attracted by his fiery eloquence, his love of right, his high character, and last, not least, by his success with their unending curiosity about celebrities. They ran after him, they wrote to him, they surrounded him with an atmosphere both intoxicating and insidious. And so it came about that with the old trustful love was mingled just a trifle of uneasiness, which, though she scarcely allowed it to herself, persistently troubled her. In spite of Suzanne's faith in her husband, the vaguest of little fears floated, every now and then, across her mind. She realized that her hold on him might possibly grow weaker, or slacken. She was growing older; a few grey threads silvered her pretty brown hair, her cheek was losing its freshness; and the lines on her brow, though not

deep, as yet, were coming all the same. Michael, on the contrary, who was only four years older than herself, remained as young as ever, without a single grey hair, as strong, energetic, and bright as a boy, and looking as if his thirty years of active life had never weighed on him. Yes: Suzanne could not help regretting the days that, seated in one of those old-fashioned arm-chairs, she watched Michael writing at his old-fashioned table, while she pretended to read some novel, or did some plain sewing for the house. And so it was that, for the sake of living in that dear past, she unconsciously loved to shut herself up in this little simple room, to which only their intimate friends were admitted.

On this particular day Suzanne was there with her two little girls: Annie, eight years old, and very tall and slim for her age; rather pale, with fair hair, and a little pensive face, lighted up with two great, grey eyes, Michael's eyes, and with a serious, tender, almost sad expression; and Laurel, younger by two years, a dark child, that seemed to smile with every feature of her face; with merry eyes, a rather large mouth, and round, dimpled cheeks. The two children stood, as was their wont, on each side of their mother, the eldest on her right, the youngest on her left,

quietly playing with the rings on the hand which she gave them.

As she watched their gentle ways, which seemed natural enough to the eldest girl, but must have cost many an effort to Laurel, Suzanne was talking to a visitor, Jaques Mondet, the most intimate friend of her husband's boyhood. He had arrived, unexpectedly, by the morning express, called to town on some family matter. He could only be away for forty-eight hours from the public school at Annecy, where he and Michael studied, as boys, and where, for the last ten years, he had been Latin master. Knowing, as he did, that there was always a room for him at the Teissiers, he had come to ask for it, sure of a warm welcome. Mondet was the friend of both husband and wife. The Teissiers had spent several summers in his neighbourhood, on the shores of the little lake, whose waves seemed to whisper memories of boyhood to Michael. The two friends were never separate. At first Suzanne had not quite liked Mondet; but gradually a feeling of the strongest friendship had grown up between them, as she learnt to know him better. This good soul, without ambition as without fortune, with wisely disciplined wants, who hid a warm heart, and an exceptional large-mindedness, under a rough exterior, came to seem

to her, as she said, Michael's "good angel." She admired him for his simplicity, his uprightness, his good sense. At times she could almost have envied his wife, who, though living in no atmosphere of glory, had, at least, her husband all to herself, or, at all events, shared him only with her six big, well-fed, ill-dressed children, whose demonical racket did not in the least disturb Mondet in his wearisome work of correcting school exercises. She felt that these two beings, who loved and helped each other in all things, and were strong and well, had wisely accepted life as it is, and enjoyed it, plagued neither by importunate desires, nor by unattainable aspirations. In Michael's life she felt there was always a great unsatisfied gulf of longing, a vast ocean of ambition, on which his soul was tossed; calm only until some breath of wind should come to stir it to its depths. Mondet, for his part, admired Suzanne for her charm of reserve, for her beaming goodness, for her utter devotion to the "great man" for whom he too had an almost fatherly love. He used often to say to Teissier:

"You have the very wife in the whole world to suit you, my fine fellow. You ought to be the happiest of men!"

And Teissier would answer,

"Quite true; and I am happy, perfectly happy."

But sometimes he would add,

"In any case, I am too busy to be anything else."

At this Mondet would stop, puzzled, with a vague sort of intuition that there was a wheel that creaked, ever so little, in the machinery of that happiness.

Suzanne and Mondet had many things to tell each other. They had met but rarely for the last four years. Ever since Teissier had become so successful, the holidays at Annecy had been given up. So they talked of all sorts of things, interrupted every now and then by Laurel, who was getting tired of being good and quiet so long.

When Mondet had told all his news of his wife, and his six children, Suzanne's turn came to take her share in the conversation. "How he has got on!" Mondet kept repeating, as he listened with admiration. "You know, at the next election he is dead sure to be returned, unopposed, for our department. We are only afraid that if, as is very likely, he is returned for the Seine too, he will give us up."

"Yes," said Suzanne, with a touch of pride: "he is very popular. Everywhere they acknowledge the purity of his motives, and the steadiness of his principles. But . . . his whole life goes in

it : he no longer is ours, but belongs to everybody."

"What else would you have? A great man can't be at the same time a man of leisure. and he *is* a great man—there is no doubt about it—a *really* great man. I have always had a high opinion of him ever since the days when I used to help him with his Latin exercises, for Latin was never his strong-point. Yet, I own, he astonishes me, and has surpassed all my expectations. When I look at what he has done the last four years! . . . the irresistible geniality of temper with which he set to work to organize the forces of the Conservative Party to resist the Jacobinism that threatened to be so dangerous, the wisdom of his suggestions, the cleverness of his tactics, his eloquence."

Here Suzanne modestly interrupted him.

"But we must remember that he has had the support of the country, and been thoroughly well backed up in other quarters."

"Well backed up?" said Mondet. . . . "H'm —and by whom, I should like to know?"

"Well, by those who share the leadership of the Party with him: by publicists like Peyraud, by deputies like De Thornes, or Monseigneur Russel."

Mondet shook his head.

"Peyraud—De Thornes—Monseigneur Russel—I should like to see what they would be without him—they and their friends. No, no: I know only too well that it is Michael—on whom the burden really falls—and do you know why? Because he is worth all the others put together. They are mere puppets, who have their own ends to attain. But he, with his lofty character, has faith, will, and an ideal—things that are only too rare now-a-days. These it is that have helped him to save us. Has he changed much since he has been playing this great part?"

"Oh dear, no! He is just the same as ever; calm, self-possessed, thinking of everything and unmoved by the hottest struggle . . . To-day, for instance, he is to make a great speech, and yet, if you had seen him at breakfast——"

Mondet hastily interrupted her.

"He is making a speech, and you are not at the Chamber?"

"No: he does not like me to be there when he's speaking; and I don't think I should like it particularly myself. I should be stared at; and no one knows better than you that I don't care for that sort of thing, though I *do* care for something else."

"I have never heard him; and, if I had only

known he was to speak, I could have come up from Annecy last night. It would have been just as easy. I am so sorry. What is his speech about?"

"He has introduced a measure demanding the suppression of the Law on Divorce."

Mondet opened his eyes with astonishment. "And why does he want to do away with divorce?" he exclaimed. "Divorce is necessary. It exists for excellent reasons: it——"

Suzanne interrupted him. "Michael's quite right, and, if you heard him, you would be sure to agree with him. You must not forget that, in his scheme, everything—the family, society, and the Church—all go to make up one sacred whole. Its integrity ought to be respected. Of course, I can't explain it all to you, but he is quite admirable when he touches on these questions. I am sure he will have had no end of a success to-day."

Mondet's astonishment could be seen in his honest face; but he refrained from interrupting her. "You would have made a capital Member yourself," he said, smiling. "Yes, indeed: you would have seconded Michael every bit as well as De Thornes and Monseigneur Russel. He may be right, if you say he is; and he thinks

he is; but it's a serious business—a serious business."

As he said this, the door opened, and, without waiting to be announced, a charming-looking girl entered the room. The children rushed at her to be kissed. She stroked Annie's long hair, and held out her hand to Suzanne, who said—

"Good morning, Blanche."

"I came to ask you to give me a dinner," she began, "if I don't put you out."

"You know that you never put us out; and, to-day, as it happens, we have an old friend with us, a friend of yours, too——"

Blanche, who had not observed Mondet till now, advanced towards him, with her hand out.

"M. Mondet!"

"Mdlle. Estève!—I dare not call you 'Blanche after not meeting you for these long five years. How changed you are in the time—how changed!"

Blanche's father, Raoul Estève, also a native of their province, had had a third share in the close friendship that united Teissier and Mondet. He was a clever engineer, energetic, full of ideas and initiative, accidentally killed in the prime of life in a railway disaster, leaving a wife and a daughter, if not in actual penury, in very straitened circumstances.

Teissier, taking on himself to act in the place of their incapable trustee, managed to disentangle the mess in which Estève had left his money affairs, and to save from the general wreck enough to insure Blanche's future. His widow, after a great show of rather noisy grief, married again, before she had left off her weeds, a M. De Quérieux, a rich and insignificant fribble. There were no children by this second marriage, which had plunged her into a whirl of fashionable life, for which she always had a liking. As her daughter, who was no more like her in character than in face, grew up, she found her in the way. She neglected her; and Blanche, hating M. De Quérieux, against whom she cherished a secret grudge, unhappy in her loveless home, disgusted by the manners and habits to which she had to conform, grew gradually estranged from her own family, and almost became the adopted daughter of Suzanne.

Mondet knew her story. He had (so to speak) watched Blanche grow up, for she used to accompany the Teissiers in their holiday trips. But he had not seen her, now, for four years, and in that time she had greatly changed and improved. She had turned into a slight, refined-looking, girl, with something about her more attractive than mere beauty. She had that, too; but it was of the

unobvious sort that easily escapes the ordinary observer.

The irregularity of her features prevented their harmoniousness from being taken in at once. Her hair, at first sight, seemed too colourless for her blue-veined and almost excessively fair skin; long eyelashes shaded her eyes, as though to hide their curious aquamarine colour, their limpid sparkle, and their infinitely sweet expression. She had to be well looked at before her charm was fully grasped. As she walked, her movements were rather slow, but full of the gracefulness of a refined nature. In speaking she had a grave and singularly clear voice, that gave value to her most casual word. Her ways, her gestures, her quiet dignity, conferred on her a special atmosphere of her own.

"M. Teissier was splendid to-day," said Blanche, as she sat down in the third of the old-fashioned arm-chairs.

Her manner was animated, as if she was still excited by the strife she had just witnessed.

"Have you been to the Chamber, then?" inquired Mondet.

"Yes: I went with Mdme. De Thornes. Would you believe it?—she had never heard him before!"

"Like me," said Mondet.

"And me," said Suzanne, with a half-smile.

"You don't need to go and hear him in the Chamber," said Blanche, "for you have him all to yourself at home, and he tells you all he does and all he says. But to-day he was more eloquent, more persuasive, than ever."

"Then, I suppose, his motion was carried?" said Suzanne.

"No; but it was a triumph all the same. Fourrée had moved the previous question; the previous question! on a motion of Teissier's! and it was rejected by a majority of upwards of a hundred. 'Urgency' was rejected also, unfortunately, but only after being put twice, and lost by a bare fifteen votes. The House became excited, and angry—the Right were growling, the Left applauding—when, in the middle of the fuss, he stood up, and said in his deep, clear, voice, that is always heard over everything, 'Very well, then: we shall only have to do it all over again.' And then some of them got very angry, even in the galleries, which were choke-full. I don't think he ever raised such a storm before. But you know how calm he always is in a storm."

She became more and more excited as she spoke; her voice trembled with suppressed enthusiasm;

Mondet shook his head, in a way he had when he disapproved.

"Why does Michael take up such a matter as divorce?" he asked. "It is one of those puzzling questions that is much better left alone. From time to time they get settled one way or the other, for good or ill. But once they are settled, it is better to let them be. I know nothing about the law now in force; but in any case it can't be so much out of date as to require to be tampered with so soon."

"Michael would convert you," said Suzanne, as Blanche was preparing to reply. "And here he is!"

He entered the room as she spoke. He was tall and manly-looking, with a strongly-marked profile, and a determined expression, dark-brown hair, cut short, and a moustache curling upwards.

"Good morning," he said, as he came in. "What! you, Mondet? and what piece of good luck brings you here?"

He held out his hand to him.

But Mondet knew his old friend too well not to detect ever so slight a tinge of annoyance in his voice, despite the cordiality of his words, and action. He was more puzzled than put out by it.

"Only something about my aunt's will," he answered. "The lawyer wanted to see me: so I have run up for two days."

"What! only for two days?" and this time Michael's cordiality was more marked. "But, since you have got away, we must at least make it worth your while. Should you like a little holiday? I can get it for you if you would."

"Are you, then, in such favour with the Minister?"

"No—at daggers drawn. And that's why I should get anything if I chose to ask."

"And you're the man who wants to set everything to rights, and talk like that——," began Mondet.

But Michael had already turned to Mdlle. Estève, and was not listening to him.

"What a good idea of yours to come this evening, Blanche," he said to her, taking her hand.

His face had all lighted up; then, turning towards a young man, who had entered the room with him, but who had hung behind, he added—

"Allow me to present M. Maurice Peyraud to you. I do not think you know him, although he is one of our best friends."

The young man bowed to Blanche, who said—

"No—but I am one of his constant readers."

Then Teissier, with an almost feverish restlessness, turned to his wife. "And now, my dear, may we sit down to dinner at once, and get through with it as quickly as possible? M. Peyraud has a number of proofs to correct this evening, and I brought him here because it is close to his printer's."

"Dinner is quite ready," answered Suzanne. "We have been waiting for you at least three-quarters of an hour."

In the quick play of conversation that had taken place since Michael came in there was nothing whatever to lay hold of. And yet why did it give Mondet a curious feeling of uneasiness? Why was he conscious of a vague something in the air, strained, and heavy, and threatening, that gave him a dull ache at his heart? Loving friends do, sometimes, have these mysterious intuitions, due, perhaps, to the sensitiveness of affection.

The dinner was of Spartan simplicity, the meal of people who don't attach much importance to the table. The conversation was wholly political. Peyraud took the lead, reverting again and again to the subject of that day's debate. He was a charming talker, using a great wealth of apt illustration, and touching lightly on matters psychological and moral. Mondet played up to

him with his usual clear-sighted good sense. Michael was absent, hardly seeming to listen, and was either silent or spoke with a nervous and irritable volubility.

"You are only a looker-on, a dilettante, a man of letters," he said suddenly to Peyraud, who had just been telling of an interesting divorce case. "In reality, I am always surprised to see you on our side, although I know you are one of our very best officers. But you are interested in facts merely because they suggest ideas. Your opinions are only speculative and philosophical. You love to look at all sides of a question. It is a dangerous game to play. We, on the contrary, are nothing if not practical. We act before we think. It is the only way to get anything done. It does not prevent us in the least from knowing what we want. For the last twenty years France has been busy destroying and pulling down everything. We are rebuilding. That's all. We came into a tumble-down house, which we want to make sound and safe. So we rather distrust you and your psychology. *Our* theories are much more simple."

"You speak as if you were in the Chamber," said Mondet.

"Not quite. In the Chamber I am longer-

winded, and repeat myself more. But perhaps you're right, and it's the same sort of thing, after all. What would you have me do? I haven't one set of opinions for the gallery and another for home consumption. You must be content to see me as I am, old man; and you ought not to be surprised at it, for you have known me ever since I was born!"

Mondet was not averse from a joke, and putting on a humorous look,—

"On my word!" he said, "what strikes me most in your conversation now is the reckless way in which you have burnt your boats!"

Then, as everyone looked at him in astonishment, he added, turning to Suzanne:

"It's quite true! You may be perfectly easy in your mind now, dear lady. . . . If ever your great man should think of playing with divorce—he is done for—dished—he has tied his own hands!"

And thereupon the worthy Mondet burst out laughing. Nobody followed his example. Suzanne, alone, gave a satisfied smile; Michael shrugged his shoulders; and after a short silence Peyraud began again:

"You may be quite easy too, M. Mondet. Do you know what the source of M. Teissier's greatest strength is? It is neither his eloquence nor

his genius. It is his character, and, most of all perhaps, his private life, in which no one has ever been able to pick a hole."

Mondet gave Suzanne a look as if to say that that was precisely what he himself had just said. But Michael broke out hastily:

"I think you attach more importance to such things than they really have."

"They have more than you, who are superior to them, think for," replied Peyraud. "M. De Thornes, of whom one can't say as much, was saying that very thing to me just now, during the sitting, and you know yourself how clear-sighted he is. 'We are a funny people,' he said: 'virtue always seems to us rather ridiculous, and yet we need it, and are more influenced by it than by anything else.' And I don't think he was far wrong."

"Which does not prevent some people getting on in the world without it," said Teissier. "Look at Diel, for instance. He doesn't owe much of his success to his virtue—does he?—yet he remains safely Colonial Minister, in spite of scandal. Look at Combel, too. That's a stronger case even than the other. He is utterly blown upon, and yet he has not fallen one iota in public estimation. In his past life he has about as shady associations as a man well could have: women, money matters, and

so on. It only seems to make him all the more powerful. Even his opponents allow that he makes a very respectable President of the Council. Is it not so?"

Peyraud's opinion seemed unshaken by the examples given.

"All that is not quite so much to the point as it looks," said he. "Combel and Diel are exceptions. Evil-doing seems to have answered in their cases. They might do almost anything now. Nothing would injure them. They have no reputation to lose. They are proof against attack. Everything has been said that could be said. They could weather any scandal."

"Peyraud," said Michael, "it seems to me you are contradicting yourself."

"Not at all. Let me finish. If they have succeeded, it is owing to one quality that takes the place of all others—supreme audacity!"

"Oh, that's paradoxical!"

"Not in the least. But what is true of them is true of them only. They are quite abnormal, and, as such, cannot be judged by general laws. But if anyone else did, or had done, a tenth part of what they do, it would be fatal to him. For the ordinary honest man even less would suffice to destroy him. The least thing—momentary weakness,

ever so slight an error of judgment—would do it."

"I think M. Peyraud is right," said Mondet, who was listening with all his attention. "It's only rascals that are ever forgiven: so look out for yourself, Michael! You are condemned to be permanently virtuous, my dear boy!"

"Nothing one could say on that subject could apply to M. Teissier," said Peyraud. "He does not know what temptation means."

The subject dropped amid dead silence. Then Michael joined in with more good temper than he had yet shown.

"You know, dear children, everyone has his faults and his little weak points, and we are none of us much better or worse than our neighbours, unless they be such utterly worthless ones as Diel and Combel. For, after all, we are the slaves of circumstance. Mine took me from the first along a straight road, and so I must keep to it, I suppose. If you want to know, I may as well tell you that I have sometimes been tempted to step away from it: I have, indeed! but I never did stray—probably because my road was not an altogether unpleasant one."

As he said this, he turned towards his wife, who smiled at him.

"It may be, too, that I had an instinct of what Peyraud has just said, although I'm neither a psychologist nor a philosopher. Perhaps I felt that virtue is a power in itself. Our conduct is generally governed by self-interest."

"Well, you see, you end by allowing that I was right," said Peyraud. "Stay! Let me quote something that De Thornes said about the very thing we are discussing: 'To Teissier, good behaviour has become as good as a talisman.'"

"Still, it's curious," observed Mondet, "that the exact contrary seems to succeed equally well at times, for Diel would infallibly come to grief if he ever dreamt of giving up his vices, and becoming a decent member of society, and Teissier would do the same should he ever stray from the path of virtue."

"Yes: it's curious," said Peyraud; "but so it is; and perhaps it is just as well, for it widens the gulf fixed between the goats and the sheep."

"At the same time," continued Michael, "justice generally has the last word. Some day you will see Combel and Diel and their congeners, all come down with a run. For a time beggars of that sort seem to ride on horseback. They are tremendously admired; their position shows they are strong; and that's sufficient excuse for everything. When lo!

some fine day trouble comes, and over they go! And what a smash it is! We have seen it happen before. Do you remember that Caffarel business, and all that came of it? Well, wait a bit, and see if we don't have others brought to judgment in just the same way."

They all rose from the table. Michael had stood up to finish his tirade, which he ended by a telling gesture. They went back to the little sitting-room, where Suzanne, helped by Blanche, poured out the coffee. Peyraud hastily swallowing his, apologised for having to leave in a hurry. The little circle was reduced to intimates only.

Teissier, who did not smoke, offered a cigar to Mondet.

"You keep parlous good cigars, my friend," he exclaimed, after the first two or three puffs, "and yet you don't smoke yourself. Do you get them for your political friends?"

"Well, of course."

"You entertain, then, a good deal?"

It was Suzanne who answered.

"We have nearly always someone with us."

"You go out a good deal, too, I fancy,—don't you?"

"A good deal more than I care for," said Teissier.

"Does it amuse you?"

"I should think not. You, living quietly in your little den at Annecy, where one day is exactly like another, can have no idea how worn out I am sometimes, how tired and sick of my life. I feel as if I had a mountain on top of me, and I can't get away from it."

"Fancy: you complaining—a man who is what *you* are, and does what *you* do!"

"What has that got to do with it? Sometimes the very sight of a human being is odious to me, and I loathe those who are called, erroneously, our neighbours. I should like to flee from them and their clatter, and rush away somewhere, anywhere, with my own people, and a few friends, choice spirits, with whom I might lead a peaceful life, free from all this worry, and constraint, and bother."

While Michael was speaking, Mondet watched him with an expression of wonder and keen curiosity. He noticed it, and, wincing, stopped.

"Those are singular sentiments," said his friend, after a short silence, "for a man who has great ends in view, who has taken up large questions, and wants to make his countrymen moral by Act of Parliament, and set the world in general to rights. If your colleagues and constituents were only to hear you——"

Michael interrupted him with a shrug of his shoulders.

"But they don't hear me! They only see the side that I show to the world. But there is another, the real one——" His voice sank.

"Do you mean," said Mondet, with an almost painful earnestness, "that you are only playing a part? that you are as sceptical as the rest? and that you have only taken up the line that you think will pay best?"

Teissier stopped him.

"Certainly not! I believe in what I have taken in hand, and what I say about it, and I try my utmost to do what I think is for the best. But I can't help myself, if I have my fits of exhaustion, of weakness, of doubt. I doubt myself sometimes —and you have happened to come when I have one of those fits on me."

Mondet shook his head again.

"I don't quite understand," he said. "I should have thought that the task you have set yourself would have got hold of you and made you happy."

Then, turning to Suzanne, who was listening in silence, he added, "Why do you let him talk so?"

"How am I to prevent him?" she answered. "And he's like that oftener than you would believe. If you only knew how nervous he is! Public life

has taken away all his health and strength, even his pluck, sometimes. I often bemoan it, I can tell you; and wish I could tear him away from it; but it's no use: he will stand to his guns till he drops."

And then there was a moment's silence, which was broken by Mondet saying gravely and reflectively—

"Perhaps it is just as well that so sensitive, imaginative, and easily influenced a man should be kept hard at work. He needs it, dear lady. Were he not so—who knows?—he might give you graver cause for anxiety."

"In any case," said Michael, "what we are saying does not matter much. We do not lead our own lives: we are led by them."

So saying, he rose, and, sitting down by Blanche, who had sat aloof and taken no part in the conversation, began to talk in an undertone to her, while Suzanne and Mondet took up the thread of their talk where they had left it off. These respective conversations were carried on for some little time, when Mondet, having yawned more than once, made Suzanne exclaim—

"You are worn out, M. Mondet, and can hardly bear it any longer; and I, quite forgetting, keep on making you talk."

"Railway travelling is tiring, especially when one's not used to it."

"Your room is ready: so come along. I will take you there, and see that nothing has been forgotten."

She rose. Mondet said good-night to Blanche and Michael, and left the room with Suzanne.

Silence fell on the little room for a moment. Blanche and Michael exchanged a rapid glance; then both turned their eyes towards the door, as though listening to the sound of the gradually retreating footsteps, which were deadened by the carpet of the passage outside. Then they looked at each other again, but this time with less restraint; and Michael, throwing himself at the young girl's feet, seized her hands, and covered them with kisses. For a moment they remained thus, silently absorbed in one another, and embodying in this, the only, demonstration of their love that they ever allowed themselves, all the joy and anguish of their vain desires. Their fatal passion had only grown stronger the more they had struggled against it. It alternately tortured and intoxicated them; and, though they might control it, they could not conquer it. They did not speak, and yet said everything. Blanche gently pressed Michael's hands. Their breath came quickly. The storm, whose electricity Mondet

had felt in the air in the evening, had broken at last. Then a noise, something moving, startled them, and Michael rose, saying hastily—

"Now that we are alone . . ."

Taking a letter from his pocket, he gave it to Blanche, who hid it quickly in her bosom, and gave him another in exchange.

When he took hold of her hands again, the girl asked—

"What have you told me in your letter?"

"You will see," he answered. "It's always the same thing: that I love you, I love you, and am miserable."

She pressed his hands.

"Miserable?"

"Well, not just now—not during those very rare moments when I am near you, when I feel as if I were yours only. But at all other times—always! When I act scarcely knowing what I do, when I speak without knowing what I say, it is because you are in my mind. And when I am alone . . . why, to-day, when I was speaking in the Chamber——"

"You spoke so well, too!"

"I don't know whether I did or not. I did not hear one word I was saying. I was thinking only of you, as usual."

"And yet you never looked at me!"

"It was because I was pleading, as you know but too well, against you, against myself, against my own heart! Mondet did not know how right he was just now. Yes: I was burning my boats—*our* boats—worse luck!—and the smoke and flame overcame me. All the mad plans that have rushed through my brain since I have loved you were crumbling to pieces. At every word I spoke I felt more and more clearly that never, never could you be mine. For was I not destroying our only hope, the last plank we had to cling to? I could have cried out with pain, for my own words seemed to scorch me!"

Blanche drew back, as she listened to him, with a startled cry.

"Yes," he continued: "I never told you; but I have often thought of it. After all there was only the one way—divorce."

She made as though she was going to put her hand on his lips.

"Silence, Michael! I beg you will never say such a thing again. How can you? You *must* know that it is no use talking like that. It *never* could be."

"You are right—it never could be. But I had it so constantly on my mind that I ended by think-

ing it was not so impossible as all that. The idea haunted me. I tried to put it on one side."

"You did well. Don't forget, dear, what you so often have said to me, yourself. 'We are masters of our feelings, but not of our acts.' Is that so? I'm not sure. 'There is nothing wrong in our loving one another, provided we don't inflict pain on anyone else.'"

"Yes: it's true—I did say that; I thought it; I think it still: but my power of will is gone; I love you too much!"

She drew nearer to him.

"You never can do that."

"I do! I ought to be stronger; I ought to have been so from the first. And now I hate and despise myself for not having controlled myself, and concealed my love! I am destroying your life, and robbing you of happiness you might have had——"

"Don't say that. I am happy."

As she said this, impelled partly by the longing that all women have to comfort those they love, when they see them suffering, and partly from a feminine fondness for caressing tendernesses, she began to pass her hand through his hair, almost as a mother would, gently, soothingly. They were so happy thus, so absorbed in each other, so forgetful of all else, of all that threatened them, of all that

kept them apart, of all that life and duty interposed between them and their love, that when the door opened, noiselessly, it was unheeded by them. They did not see Suzanne enter, stop short on the threshold, make one step forward, put her hand on her heart, turn deadly pale, and walk away without uttering a sound. They remained thus a moment or two longer, scarcely exchanging a word. Then they grew calmer, and began to talk more quietly, sitting side by side, with nothing unusual to be seen in their manner when shortly afterwards, Suzanne entered and joined, without apparent embarrassment, in their conversation.

The evening dragged on a little longer, slowly, almost painfully, as it is apt to do with people who, tired from the fatigues of the day, know each other well enough to be able to give way to their weariness. As ten o'clock struck the servant came to announce Mdlle. Estève's carriage. Blanche rose shook hands with Michael, and kissed Suzanne who turned pale, and shut her eyes. Nothing visible, not a word, not a movement, betrayed the tragedy that was being enacted between the three.

But when Blanche had gone Michael looked at his wife and saw she could scarcely stand.

"What's the matter?" he asked, affectionately.

"I am not feeling very well this evening," she replied, in her usual voice.

"Not feeling very well?" he said, solicitously.

"Don't be uneasy: it's nothing. I'm a little over-tired. I had a good deal of shopping to do to-day: a night's rest will set me all right. Good-night."

She held her brow out to him, and he touched it with lips that were burning.

"Are you coming up?" she asked.

"No: it's too early. I'm going to work a little in my study, first."

He took up a lamp, and went out before her. She repeated her usual evening injunction: "Don't overwork yourself."

He turned in the doorway to answer. "Never fear: you know how strong I am."

Suzanne waited until he had shut the door, and then, unable to bear up any longer, she threw herself, sobbing, into an arm-chair. She could not doubt the evidence of her own eyes. But, as often happens to us in the case of a sudden death, she could not yet realize the full extent of her unhappiness. She kept on repeating to herself, "It's all over!" scarcely taking in the meaning of the fatal words. Then she asked herself, "What must I do?" not aware of the full bearing of that

question. And the long, sad hours of night threw their pall over her unanswered grief.

Michael, meantime, had forgotten about his wife's pretended illness. And yet he was not working. When he had seated himself at his writing-table he began by clearing part of it, and pushing aside the papers that littered it. Drawing Blanche's letter from his pocket, he read it over and over again; but before burning it, as he always did, he copied out, and meant to keep in a safe place, the following fragment which had set him thinking.

"——I never told you about a strange and delightful sort of dream that I had some time back. I had been thinking a good deal of our hopeless, guilty, dangerous love, and I was sad and despairing. I saw that the future held nothing for us, and I thought my head must have given way from very weariness and grief—when all of a sudden, a delicious feeling of peace and rest stole over me; for it came to me as in a vision, what I could and ought to be, to you. I seemed to see that there was an exceptional and subtle bond between us, a sort of partnership of love. I would be more than a sister to you, for had we not our secret to share? More than a friend, since I knew of your love for me; more

than a wife, for, seeing me but seldom, you could not grow weary of me; and then there would be no shame in our love. When I grow old, your love would only change its way of loving; and if I had to leave you, your grief would be without bitterness, as without remorse. There I felt so happy that I straightway fell into a tranquil sleep, such as I had not had for a long, long time."

Michael fell into a long train of thought over this part of her letter, for it filled him with an immense joy to know himself loved, and with a terrible despair to think what almost superhuman strength of will it would require to prevent a guilty catastrophe. He, too, like her, who still lay sobbing in the little deserted room, asked himself "What is to be done?" Although he may not have felt, as she felt, stricken to the heart, he was bitterly conscious of the depth of his moral turpitude, and of the seemingly hopeless abyss that lay between him and his happiness.

Meantime, Blanche had reached the luxurious and loveless home that had never called forth an echo from her heart, and had locked herself into her bedroom to read Michael's letter.

"If you but knew," he wrote, "how deeply I bless and thank you! If you but knew how

generous and noble I think you, and how intensely I admire you for giving me a love that can only mean to yourself sacrifice, and sorrow, and self-denial ! . . . I have never given much thought to matters of the heart—my life too has been a public one ;—and now suddenly you teach me all its hidden secrets. I can now read the meaning of words that used to be a closed book to me, and understand things that have hitherto been hidden. Or rather, I *feel* them: my soul apprehends them. Yes: I see and feel that we have, you and I, a new life, that belongs to us alone. I feel and understand to the full, the depth, and terror and pitilessness, and sacredness, and joy, of the secret that unites us. I see and feel that, guided by one another, we have been led into a world whose portals are unlocked to few: for our love can be made to yield us happiness only by our rising superior to love. It is guilty, I know, for it is forbidden, and must be hidden by dissimulation and falsehood. And yet it seems to me that we may, in a sense, purge it of its sin, by trying to make ourselves nobler by it. Do I delude myself, dear? If I do, it is unpardonable in a man like me, who ought to know enough of life not to fall into so gross an error of heart and conscience. But what does it matter,

after all? I can't keep smiling when I think of the verdict the world would pass on us if they knew. Yes, I can afford to smile; for what do I care for anything that is not you? I throw myself into the joy of loving you, and should fain yield to the temptation of giving up everything for your sake, were it not for those innocent beings whom I am bound to shield and defend against myself. From the very anguish that I feel at my own powerlessness, from the knowledge of the happiness within my reach, and which I may not grasp, from this anguish, I say, I feel that our love is its own excuse; its very strength is in self-sacrifice. . . ."

Blanche read these words over and over again; and as her tears fell on the paper, she asked herself by what cruel fatality she had come to love one who could never be hers, and should be doomed to grow old without ever tasting that joy of loving and being loved, freely and without stint, which is given to all lovers, and wives and mothers?

II.

The next morning Mondet rose betimes, and began by having a good look round the house, to explore the arrangement of the rooms, their fur-

niture, which looked rather too much as if it had been bought in a hurry, and the slightly mixed character of the pictures on the walls, as if, perchance, they might reveal something of the secret he wanted to fathom; for the more he thought it over, the more convinced he was that the tinge of hesitation and reserve in Michael's first greeting was due to a certain annoyance at his unexpected arrival. Had his affection for his oldest friend waned because he was too preoccupied with the cares of Party leadership? or was it caused by something else?—some anxiety, some threatened danger?—perhaps one of those skeletons that are hidden away at times in the most humdrum lives?—or money troubles? or was some woman at the bottom of it all? As he turned these questions over in his mind, without arriving at any satisfactory solution, Mondet sat down at the table in the dining-room—a long table, looking as if it was always waiting to be laid for a crowd of guests. A manservant came up to him, and asked what he would take—Tea, coffee, or chocolate? He answered gruffly:

"I will wait for M. Teissier, and take whatever he takes."

"He always has soup, sir," said the man.

"Then I will take soup, too."

Mondet's tone grew gentler all of a sudden. It pleased him to hear that Michael, in spite of his newly-acquired luxury, kept to this old habit of his youth and provincial bringing-up. His heart softened, and he drew various conclusions from the insignificant fact. He began to hope that he had been wrong, that his friend was the same as ever, that he had no skeleton to hide, but was only tired and depressed, as a Deputy may well be, after attending a long sitting and making a speech.

It struck nine o'clock as Teissier entered the room, ready dressed to go out.

"Ah, there you are!" said Mondet, shaking him by the hand; "I see you are not a very early riser."

"Do you? Would it never enter your head that I have been up these two hours, totting up figures? . . . Indeed I have, though. I am on the Budget Committee. And now I'm as hungry as a hunter!"

As he gulped down his soup, hastily, he added, speaking with his mouth full—

"This is not Annecy, my dear fellow! Here we go out of an evening, come home late, work into the small hours, and sleep when we can, if one is lucky enough of course to have an easy

mind, and not be troubled by sleeplessness. Anyhow, morning comes, whether one has or not! . . ."

"We each have our own ways," said Mondet, philosophically, adding, "I am glad to see that you have a good appetite. But you eat too fast: it's bad for the digestion."

"My digestion is the best thing about me," answered Teissier, as he wiped his moustache; "but don't you hurry; I can wait for you. Can't we go out together? Where do you want to be taken to?"

"To my lawyer's, No. 217, Rue St. Honoré. That's the only business I have got to attend to in this confounded big Paris. After that, I am free. Shan't I see anything of you?"

"Certainly; and if you had only given me longer notice, I could have arranged so as to have had all my time to myself. But when you fall from the clouds in this sort of way, what can you expect? Let's see, you will be here to luncheon, of course?"

"Yes."

"That's right. But there will be some people here for it, . . . four or five, . . . on business, as usual. But I shall be free this evening, and what do you say to our going and having

a bachelor dinner somewhere, and spending the evening together, like two old cronies—eh? Would that suit you?"

"I should think it would! But seeing how busy you are I scarcely like to take the whole of one of your precious evenings. You must not let me be in your way. . ."

"In my way! You're joking. Surely I can give myself an evening off once in a way. I have not many friends like you, old man, and you don't come so very often to Paris either."

As the carriage bowled along, and while Teissier glanced through the morning papers, observing as he did so that he would have no time to do it later, Mondet's perplexity returned. Time was when Michael would not have been so put out by his "falling from the clouds" as he called it, but would have welcomed him simply and heartily, and laid his work aside for the time being. There must be some reason for the change. What was it?

And the solution of this puzzling question filled the worthy man's thoughts quite as much as the settlement of his little legacy. He thought of it at his lawyer's, who kept him waiting some time, and then got rid of him as quickly as he could. He thought of it as he strolled through the streets looking in at the shop windows for a little present

to take to his wife. He thought of it, still, in the café in the Avenue de l'Opéra, where he went to take a glass of bitters, as he always did, of a Sunday, at home. The saloon was nearly empty. Naturally sociable, Mondet sat down at a table already occupied by two customers, who were talking together, leisurely, as if they were waiting for someone.

Suddenly he pricked up his ears; he caught the sound of Teissier's name. It had been mentioned by one of the two men, who were talking of the debate of the night before. The other rejoined in a decided tone:

"There's a man, at all events, who has had nothing ambiguous in his past life. He's a good sort, a real good sort, who lives decently and above-board, and gives no food to the newspapers by his bets or his scandals."

"We don't know everything about him," said his companion, drily.

"Not know everything?" answered the first man hotly. "How could a man in his position hide anything? If there were anything against him, don't you think it would have been ferreted out by one of our political jackals and thrown in his teeth long ago? No, no, he's all square; they have never dared to throw dirt at him."

"Nevertheless, I *have* heard something."

"What, now?"

"I can't recollect for the moment, but it was something about a woman; something in which he did not play a very creditable part. After all, why should he be any better than other people?"

"Why? I don't know. But it's quite certain that he *is* better. One feels it in his speeches. He inspires trust. If, as you say, it could be proved that he was no better than other folks, I should never believe in anything, or anyone, political, again."

With that they began talking of something else. The whole incident had astonished Mondet. So in Paris they were much the same as at Annecy. He had heard the same wholesome, middle-class, opinion expressed there about his friend a hundred times. What made the voters crave so for honest men? Was it that they were tired of being so often humbugged? or was it that Michael's straightforwardness and strong personality had imposed itself on them, and made virtue fashionable? "We are a funny people, a funny people!" Mondet kept repeating to himself as he took the last sip of his bitters; and while his change was being fetched, he muttered to himself, "Ouf: all nations are pretty much alike. Mankind is

better than it gets credit for. . . They prefer the right without knowing exactly why. They don't often think about it, but they wake up when called upon to act. They like to be led by those who deal fairly by them." In the street he went on philosophizing: "If Teissier be not as sincere as he seems, what a swindle he will be, for he has hit on the very thing we want He has struck a chord in the nation's heart that has been too long untouched—that of simple honesty of purpose. No one has ventured to touch it. The moment anything was suspected of being virtuous it was immediately turned into ridicule. But he dared to face it, and he has won. If he will only stick to his colours!" His reverie was cut short by the hustling of the passers-by, which wakened him to the fact of how late the hour was. Hurrying home, he found on arrival Suzanne in the large drawing-room, surrounded by De Thornes, Peyraud, as ever, fresh from one leader, and on the way to another, and five or six other people, amongst whom was a priest. They were all talking of Teissier who was keeping everyone waiting, as usual.

He arrived at last, and apologized as he shook hands all round. As soon as they were seated at table they plunged into politics.

Mondet listened with all his ears, for more than one of the talkers was famous, and what they said might influence the future of his country. They talked of the working classes, of the Army, of the rising generation, of the Church. How best to satisfy the working man? How to raise the moral tone of the Army? What did the youth of the country really want? Was the Church worth considering or could the country get on without her? They all seemed to wish to do the right thing, but could not agree as to what it was, except De Thornes, who jerked out his opinions, full-fledged, in a short, sharp voice that made them sound like words of command. Peyraud was the disturbing element. He had a qualification always ready—a *but* that damps all enthusiasm. He discovered unexpected difficulties in, apparently, the simplest questions. He turned them inside out with the most destructive dialectic subtlety until, at last Teissier, who had hitherto been almost silent, said,

"You certainly seem the very soul of negation."

This silenced him, though he disclaimed the imputation with a flourish of his hands. He was frightened at being thought to take any line in particular, for he had never yet succeeded in labelling his own slippery and evasive opinions.

A short silence followed, and then they took up once more the discussion of the evening before.

"It seems to me," said De Thornes, "that everything that happened yesterday shows that I was right. The attitude of the Chamber was plainly to be seen. We are not powerful enough as yet to take in hand all the reforms needed in our social system. We must keep more to general politics without touching on those private interests which, after all, only affect a very limited number of persons. . . ."

At this remark Teissier interposed:

"We must look matters straight in the face, and thresh them thoroughly out! Why should we fear unsettling the opinions and exciting the passions of the public? It would be all to our advantage to do so. Our ideas are new, or at least a revival. They will not be carried out without some fighting. The public conscience must be awakened before it understands and accepts them."

"You reckon a good deal on the public conscience," replied De Thornes. "I prefer trusting to ourselves, and to you, my friend. There seems to be, I know, a slight current in public opinion, which has so far carried us along; but we must not exaggerate its importance. It will depend on

whether we know how to influence and use it for our own purposes."

"Exactly," said the priest, who had not hitherto put in his word.

"They are evidently agreed about nothing," thought Mondet. And as the conversation now became general, he could see that Michael, who had not spoken with his usual animation, seemed to have retired into himself, and looked bored and absent, making signs to Suzanne to hurry on the dinner. He continued so until the meal was over, his eyes and thoughts both, evidently, wandering. In the drawing-room, after the coffee was brought in, his guests prepared to depart, and he could scarcely repress a gesture of impatience when De Thornes drew him aside and took him into his study.

"I have an important appointment to keep," said Teissier, taking out his watch.

"What I want to say to you won't wait," answered De Thornes, taking his arm.

Mondet caught the pained look that Suzanne threw after her husband. Left alone with her, he had the opportunity of seeing what he did not notice while she was fulfilling her duties as hostess, with the quiet heroism of which women only know the secret. He could see she was suffer-

ing acutely from some terrible secret trouble, which she could scarcely keep under control, for a big tear rolled down her cheek, which she tried to brush away hastily, before it was detected. Surely their friendship warranted his asking her the source of her ill-concealed sorrow? And he was on the point of begging her to tell him, when he pulled himself up warned by one of those curious instincts, born of an innate and delicate tact, which are never at fault. She had read his question in his face, however, and answered it, unasked.

"Oh, dear, how I hate those horrid politics! They are blighting our life! It is being frittered away in a perpetual Babel of talk and discussion. Michael has never any time to himself, or for me either. I told you yesterday that he was the same as ever. It's not true. He has changed, changed so that I should scarcely know him. He has become so irritable and nervous, who used to be calm and self-controlled. You may have noticed it. He's always absent now. Indeed, how could he be otherwise? It will kill him, to a certainty, if it goes on."

Mondet listened to her; watching, but he was too sagacious to be taken in. She was bemoaning herself, he thought, and telling of woes with-

out giving their real reason. So he answered her cautiously, lest he should get on the wrong track.

"But he has such a great work in hand: he has to play such a great part!"

She repeated after him, scarcely veiling the irony of her tone,—

"Yes: it's true! He has a part, a great part to play!"

"If you only heard how people are talking of him," added Mondet. "To give you an idea: Just now, in a café, I overheard a conversation between two men. You would have been gratified to hear how they admired him; for, of course, it *does* make you happy to see all he is doing all he is."

She interrupted him, murmuring, and raising her eyes.

"Happy!"

"But you used to be so proud of his first successes."

"In the old days, yes, when I still had some illusions left."

"Illusions. About what?"

"About everything: life, and the rest."

"And have you none now?"

"None."

They ceased speaking, and, after one of those pauses that say more than words, Mondet took Suzanne's hand affectionately,

"You are not telling me the truth," he said. "Politics have nothing to do with your unhappiness. There is something else, something more. Why have you not more confidence in me? I am *your* friend as well as his, and you, neither of you, ought to have any secrets from me. If there is any misunderstanding between you, I might, perhaps, be able to clear it up. I want to help you, and who knows but I might be able to?"

Suzanne shook her head; but after a little prompted by her own thoughts, she gave Mondet this pregnant answer:

"After all, why should I complain? I have got my children."

At this moment, Michael, rid at last of De Thornes, hastily entered the room, hat in hand.

"Are you going out again?" she said. "I thought there was no further sitting to-day."

"No more there is; but I have an appointment. Good-bye, darling."

He kissed her, without looking at her, or noticing the storm that was brewing in her, and turning to Mondet, said—

"It's understood, then, that I am to come to fetch you at seven o'clock, and we will dine at some café. I will show you life, my steady-going country cousin!"

When he had left the room, Suzanne and Mondet looked at each other.

"There now, you can see for yourself," she simply said.

"Yes: I can see," said Mondet, in a tone meant to soothe her: "he is preoccupied, and anxious about business matters."

"Business matters!"

This time she took no trouble to conceal her irony; and Mondet, possessed by an idea of which he could not rid himself, exclaimed—

"Come, now, you are not jealous—are you?"

She gave a nervous laugh.

"Jealous?" she said. "No; but you need not try to find out any more. There is nothing to discover: only trifles, mere shadows, women's fancies!"

Just then Annie and Laurel came in with their nurse, dressed to go out. She flung her arms round them passionately, almost despairingly, and pressed them to her, as though to shield them from some vague peril, hurriedly speaking to them. The two little things, with the tender

intuition of childhood, saw that something was the matter, and tried to comfort her. Laurel climbed on her knee and cuddled up to her like a little bird, while Annie looked at her with the long, tender, caressing gaze of her large soft eyes.

"Go, my darlings, and amuse yourselves."

"Good-bye, mother, good-bye!"

They were going, when, just as they got to the door, Annie ran back, and threw herself again into her mother's arms.

"One would almost fancy that they understood," said Suzanne, turning to Mondet.

"Yes," said he, shaking his head in his peculiar way: "they are too precocious."

He was thinking of his own six little ones, with their chubby cheeks and robust health, with the simple, affectionate ways of wholesome little animals, and how far more like real children they were than these two little city-bred Parisians: so true is it that these little beings, who share our lives, grow up in exact accordance with the atmosphere that we create for them, and the food that we provide for their minds.

The afternoon wore itself slowly out in broken snatches of conversation, and those half-confidences which, whilst saying nothing, tell every-

thing. The children came back from their walk, full of what they had seen and done.

As they chatted away, Mondet called out delightedly, "That's capital;" and, taking them on his knee, he gave them each a ride, and began to romp with them, so as to call out all the childish merriment that they had in them. At first they scarcely knew what to make of such behaviour; but they very soon began to scream with laughter, and to enjoy being bounced up and down, and having their fine clothes tossed. Nurse came to fetch them away. It was five o'clock, and Mde. Teissier was always at home to callers at that hour. And Mondet watched from a corner the many types that passed through the rooms, on this day, as on every other. There were women, who, not knowing each other, looked askance at each other over their teacups. Two Deputies all smiles, who had come, hoping to see Michael. An Academician, who talked of the coming Election, for which Monseigneur Russel was supposed to be in the running; and, as they spoke of him, Monseigneur Russel enters in person, with his fine, intellectual face, his soft voice, his ease of manner, a combination of Churchman and man of the world, with all the tact and caution of a statesman. Before many minutes

are over, he is conferring with the Academician, while the others listen in silence as they stir their tea.

"People are beginning to see how right Monseigneur Lavigerie was. The Republic is impregnable. It is firmly established, popular, strong, and wise. It is bringing back the country to us, the country that once belonged to the 'Most Christian' Kings! The Democrats thought that they could do without us. They now see their mistake, and the moment is not far distant when they will have to look to the Church for support."

"It won't do to trust too much to that," answered the Academician. "Democracy has weapons to fall back upon that we don't allow for. We are not quite sure what they may have in store for us. They will astonish us, some day, unless I am greatly mistaken: astonish us terribly, by some of those paroxysms of violence and brute force that so often accompany great crises."

"We must foresee, and guard against them."

They continued thus, discussing the future, until the entrance of a new-comer interrupted them. This time it was a talkative journalist, full of a great piece of news that he had to retail —the marriage of a well-known actress to a

gentleman. And so the conversation kept ever changing, as something fresh cropped up; and the bystanders were amused as it oscillated to and fro, from the Church to the theatres, from fashionable gossip to deep philosophy, until the room grew gradually empty.

"Now you see my life," said Suzanne, turning to Mondet as the last guest departed. "It's like that day after day. Nothing but talk—talk."

"It's interesting sometimes," answered Mondet, deprecatingly.

"Not to me, now. I know beforehand exactly what they are going to say."

"You are too quick, like those children of yours, or too sensitive."

"Just at present I feel as tired as if I had done all their talking for them."

Mondet looked at her, understandingly, with his kindly eyes.

"You know you were not listening to one of them," he said: "your thoughts were elsewhere."

"No: you are quite wrong, I assure you. Good gracious! what else should I be thinking of?"

Her voice rang so untrue, and pain was so evident, under all her pretended indifference, that

Mondet's heart ached for her. But he dared not question her further. "Yet I must get to know," he said to himself. "I will try and get Michael to tell me. He will let it all out."

Michael came in late, as usual, and, as usual, in a hurry; still a prey to the fever of unrest that nothing but action seemed to allay.

"Come along! be quick!" he called out as he entered. "I'm half-dead with hunger, and I dare-say you're the same."

Suzanne let them go, without making an effort to detain them.

"Well, and where shall we dine, Mondet?"

"Wherever you like, so long as it is somewhere quiet."

They had walked down the Rue du Helder, and presently entered the great dining-room of a fashionable restaurant. Several people nodded to Teissier.

"We could be to ourselves here and have our talk out," he said, turning to his friend. "Let us have a private room—shall we?" They followed the head-waiter, who took them to one. Sitting down, they ordered their dinner, and, as soon as the waiters left the room, Mondet, leaving his oysters untouched, put his elbows on the table, and looked Teissier straight in the face.

"Tell me," he said, bluntly, "what's the matter with you?"

Michael shrugged his shoulders. "The matter? Nothing."

"Don't tell me that. You can't take in an old friend. Why do you hide anything from me? You know you can tell me everything, and, if I know you, you must want to talk it over: so go on! Begin! It will do you good to speak out."

There was a moment's silence. Mondet began eating his oysters.

Teissier looked up at the ceiling and thought for an instant.

"Well, yes," he said at last: "you are right. There *is* something. I am horribly unhappy. I am worn out. I am living two or three different lives at the same time. I seem to have everything in the world, and yet I can't have the only thing I want and *must* have, or I shall die. Now, do you understand?"

"Yes: I do."

They were silent again. The waiter changed their plates, and brought the soup. When he was gone, Mondet resumed:

"Yes: I understand. You are in love: that's all. It's provoking, I allow, but not necessarily fatal. The worst of it is your wife knows it."

"My wife!" exclaimed Michael. "She knows nothing."

"You think so?"

"I'm certain of it."

"I'm not."

"Has she told you anything?"

"Nothing. But I can see how nervous and worried she is. Though she may not be quite sure, she suspects something of the sort; but I incline to think she knows all about it."

"All? But there's nothing to know!"

"What do you mean by nothing? Is it only platonic, then?"

"Just so: there is nothing, because there *can* be nothing. We are kept apart by an insurmountable barrier."

"What? Honour?"

Teissier answered by a shrug.

"The husband is your friend, perhaps?"

"There's no husband in the case."

Mondet, who had hitherto been swallowing a spoonful of soup between each question, suddenly stopped.

"There's no husband? Then it's an unmarried girl? Poor devil! What a hornet's nest you have pulled about your ears!"

Suddenly an idea flashed across his mind.

"Good heavens! It can't be Blanche, surely,—Blanche Estève? What on earth can you be thinking of? She, the daughter of our poor dead friend!"

"I have thought it all out, my good friend, and so has she."

"Then she knows?"

"She knows—and loves me."

Mondet started up from the table, and began pacing up and down the room in great agitation, while the waiter went on bringing in the dinner.

"But where is it going to end?" he resumed, sitting down again. "What do you propose to do? You are neither of you children; at least, *you're* not. You *must* know that it's an impossible situation?"

"We do know it."

And Michael went on speaking, dreamily.

"Yes: we know it but too well. We know what a gulf there is between us, and that we can never bridge it over. There is only one way out that I can see, and it has often crossed my mind: to get a divorce, and marry Blanche."

"But what about your wife?" said Mondet, vehemently. "It would kill her! And you forget your children?"

"It's no use discussing it," replied Michael, in

his impassive way. "I saw it was impossible: so 'I burnt my boats,' as you said, only too truly yesterday. You were right. It is to cut off my own retreat that I am pressing for the abrogation of divorce. It may be a political mistake, as De Thornes says. What do I care? If you suppose I think all that I say, or do, or am considering my Party,——"

"Don't talk such nonsense! You can't know what you're saying. It's simply ridiculous! A man of your age, in your position!"

"My age? Why, I'm a mere child, my dear fellow. In my heart I'm not more than eighteen! It has never had a chance of wearing out, and I'm just as much in love as a boy. As to my position: I curse it every day. If I were an ordinary private person——"

"Well, what if you were?"

"I scarcely know what I am saying. Listen! I am pursued by the idea that some day our innocent little secret will be found out—our poor little letters, the meetings we have where best we can. Then, some newspaper will get hold of it, and write about it, and caricature it. I shall be shown up as a monster of hypocrisy; and nothing will be left for me but to send in my resignation as Deputy, and to disappear into private

life, with the virtuous pack of Diel & Co. yelping at my heels, and hounding me down in the name of outraged morality. I often think that I, possibly, have that before me; but I don't care,—believe me."

"Just so. But have you ever thought of all that you will drag down with you? You are not isolated. You represent a whole section of society. I might almost say that you are the very soul of one Party in the country."

"And you would talk nonsense, my dear fellow! If I disappeared, you could easily find somebody much better to take my place—De Thornes, for instance, who always affects to be overshadowed by me: why, I know not. There is no weakness about *him*, or, if there is, he would never allow it to interfere with him: he is clever, perfectly self-controlled, and very ambitious. Now, I am none of these things: I'm only a simple fool."

"An honest man, you mean; and it's just because you are the only honest one, or almost the only one, that you are the most powerful of the lot, and none of them could fill your place."

"You are quite mistaken in your estimate of me, my friend. In any case, whether I stay where I am, or whether I 'go under,' is beside the question. I should be ashamed to allow it to weigh with me. When I think of it—and, indeed, I think of little

else—I never consider myself, or my position, or my Party. I think only of the small circle that my feelings or actions directly affect: of my wife, whom I love still, of my children, of Her. It is they who stand in the way. My happiness means their suffering. As I said before, there is no way out."

While the waiter was carving the fowl, the conversation dropped for awhile. The two friends sat buried each in his own thoughts. When they were once more alone, Mondet said slowly—

"We none of us have any right to make those who love us, and have never failed in their duty to us, suffer."

"I know that," answered Michael. And he went on speaking slowly, deliberately, as though it was a relief to him to be able to pour out, without stint, the anguish that had filled his heart so long.

"If you knew the mad schemes that have passed through my mind!—but perhaps you have guessed it from what I have told you. Divorce was the mildest of them. Yes: I have had visions of a romantic elopement, of flying to some far-distant country, of suicide after a month of happiness. I have thought of death, too, for me alone. Ah! death is what I fear least. It would

settle everything. But what's the good? It's all impracticable. I repeat, there is no way out."

"No: there is no way out!" repeated Mondet after him, at a loss what else to say.

But suddenly he bethought himself, and burst out:

"Stay! there is one! Pull yourself together, and, as you can do nothing for one another, give up seeing her. Play the man's part by being the stronger and wiser."

"I can't."

"You hug your chain, then?"

"Yes: I hug my chain. I cannot give it up."

"We can always do what we really want."

"Ay! when love is not in the case."

"Then you give in?"

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, you know well enough. Even with all your folly, you are too clear-sighted not to know."

"You mean that we shall do as everyone else does—that we shall become clandestine lovers, eh? Well, no: my dear fellow: you were never more wrong. We shall do nothing of the sort. It would be simply impossible, too horrible. To begin with, she would never consent: she is far too high-minded to play such a base, hypocritical, shameless part; and I should not wish her to. No, no, even

were there nothing else to prevent it. I love her too much for that!"

Mondet shook his head.

"Ah! so you think. And then, in a moment of weakness——"

"Such things don't happen except in novels. We have ourselves better in hand than that. We, surely, have some self-control left?"

"So you may, until you lose it."

"No: I know exactly how far our strength of will can be depended on."

Mondet again sprang up, and, as before, paced to and fro, while the waiter handed the coffee. Then, while it cooled, and in a compassionating tone, he said—

"Ah! poor things! you are fighting against yourselves, against nature: bravely and honestly I grant, seeking to do right. But you must put an end to your folly, and that quickly, or it will, some time or other, get the better of you. Such love as yours can't be played with! And if you are so high-minded as you say, well, the sooner you both bring your prudence and wills to a level with your minds, the better. Else—you must allow me to be frank with you, Michael, and to take the right of an old friend, to forget all your new grandeur—else you will fall, and fall more

hopelessly than people with everyday consciences, who are used to give in more easily to the petty temptations and ordinary weaknesses of life. With most people such a passion as yours is an incident, at most an accident. Take care that, with you, it is not a catastrophe."

Michael did not answer all at once, and Mondet, who was watching him, began to hope that perhaps his words had awakened an echo in his better self. Quietly and deliberately, as is often done when the soul is at white heat, he lighted a cigar, and calmly watched the rings of smoke as they circled upwards, taking the tints of the electric light. He almost seemed to have no other thought than they; and only after a long pause, Teissier let fall these words: "It's no use now: the die is cast, and things must take their own course!"

III.

Mondet's second day in Paris was entirely taken up by Teissier, who never left him. Only in the afternoon were the two friends separated for a moment.

"I have got to meet her in the Rue des Pyramides," Michael explained. "A bow, a pressure of the hand, half-a-dozen words in the street: that is all we ever get. I will rejoin you directly after."

Having found a confidant, he was loth to let him go. He never gave a thought to his clients, or to his work, or to public affairs.

"I'm taking a whole holiday to-day," he said almost cheerily, adding, expansively,—

"And to think I was almost annoyed at your unexpected arrival! Ah, me! I sometimes feel as if I *had* no friends left. Truth is, I am afraid of anybody seeing how things are. Everybody seems in the way except you, who are more than a brother to me!"

And their old friendship seemed to revive under their interminable talks, which kept ever revolving round the same topic. Mondet was aware that it was only the usual thing, a lover's egotism, and that Michael fastened himself on to him for the mere purpose of talking about Her. But there is little self-love in true friendship, and, only too happy to think he could be of any service, he allowed himself to be the willing victim of the long pent-up confidences of his friend. Truth to say, they astonished him a good deal. He had fancied he knew all Michael's different moods, his adaptability, the various twists and turns of his pliant, yet strong character, which added an element of almost feminine instability to a powerful nature While he listened, and watched him,

he seemed to see him as he passed through all his various transformations. A shy boy, sharing, by fits and starts, in the games of his schoolfellows, whom he generally preferred to avoid; then a pale, studious, ambitious, youth, hollow-cheeked from the burning of the midnight oil, given up, heart and soul, to hard work, and disdaining the pleasures usual to his age. Then, later, a budding journalist, conquering, by sheer force of will the weary tedium of his daily task; marching to success without stepping one inch out of his own path, but springing, all at once, when his chance came, from a man of letters into a man of action; a leader of a Party, and seemingly born to succeed. Then, too, looking back through the years, he could recall, from time to time, the home-life of the public man; his warm and tender affections; his rather undemonstrative and sensitive nature, slow to reveal itself, easily wounded and thrown back on itself, reserved and shy, almost to a fault. How came it that such a man was still capable of such a passion?

"I could never have believed it of you!" Mondet kept repeating, in a tone of amazement, in which one could detect, despite its reproachfulness, just a shade of admiration. "A passage of love from time to time is permissible; it is part of the

sort of life you lead, and, if it did not interfere with your career, or your home affections, would be understandable. But a real passion, a mad, romantic, unreasoning passion like this! I don't think you can realize all the absurd nonsense you have talked to me since last night!"

And then he tried to make him talk sensibly, looking at the question from all sides, and trying to find a solution.

"You may try as long as you like: there is none," Teissier would say with his quiet, clear-sighted, resigned manner.

"Who knows?" replied Mondet. "You are too interested a party to be a fit judge; but I, who am quite unbiassed, am more likely to hit on one. In any case," he went on, slowly feeling his way, "in any case, there is always the course I suggested: by calling on your good sense, and strength of will, to get yourselves in hand again before it is too late,—an act of self-sacrifice, the pleasure of which would be its own reward, and would far outweigh the fancied happiness which you would never succeed in attaining by other means."

Teissier shrugged his shoulders.

"It's no use talking," he said.

Then Mondet tried another tack; but it was

equally in vain, and the question was still where it was when the bell rang for his train to start.

"I implore you to be careful," he reiterated, as they stood on the platform together. "Do be prudent! Just think, if your wife got to know!"

"How could she possibly do so?"

"I can't say. By chance, or by intuition, perhaps; and she loves you so! How can you want to ruin your life in such a way? I hope you will let me know how things go on,—won't you? You will write to me?"

"Of course, I will. You can't think what a lot of good you have done me. It's such a comfort to have someone to unburden one's heart to.

They shook hands, and Mondet started by the express to Italy, still as puzzled as ever; while Teissier turned his steps slowly homewards.

Within a week Mondet got the promised letter.

"I am writing, dear friend, more for the sake of the comfort and solace of pouring out my heart, and for the pleasure of telling you my troubles, than because I have really anything to say. The days come and go, and bring no change in the situation: indeed, any change must be for the worse. My state of mind is as painful and undecided as ever. Sometimes I almost fancy I am happy, and that, in spite of everything, I do get

some pleasures out of my insensate passion. Have we not rapturous meetings sometimes arranged beforehand, sometimes by chance, and our letters to one another? 'Childish nonsense!' you will say. Well, so it may be; but, as I already told you, my heart is younger than my years. Then, at other times, when I have not been able to see her, or when we have missed each other, or been worried, and kept asunder by bores, it is quite the other way. I am racked by the anguish of fever, and become a prey to a terrible and indefinable disease of unrest, all the more difficult to bear because I must hide it. It is at these crises that I realize our situation most distinctly, as a flash of lurid lightning on a dark night might suddenly show a lost traveller the yawning abysses that lie in his path. A voice within me keeps telling me that we are only just at the beginning of our martyrdom, that things can't go on as they are, that the demands of our love will grow with its growth, and that the time will come when it will master us. Yet, even while I fret and yearn for the fulfilment of my longings, when all else will be forgotten, I start back when I realize the pain, the despair, the utter ruin it means to others. Why am I so morbidly prescient? Why can I not shut my eyes and take no account of the future? If only I had

the gift of reckless carelessness, and remorseless indifference to consequences, of most men! Then I might let myself float with the stream, and should not, as I do, meet misfortune half-way by anticipation. I see but too plainly where the current is bearing me. I am clinging to a frail islet on the brink of the cataract: the flood may carry it from under me at any moment. I feel it, I know it, and can do nothing: I *want* to do nothing, and *there's* the real torture. And all the time I must go on living, must come and go, and play my part in the human comedy, and, to do it, must lie by word and deed, by lip and eye, to those around me, to those I love! I despise myself for my weakness, I hate myself for my duplicity; I feel I am a guilty, cowardly sneak! In short, I am utterly miserable, dear friend; each day a little more so than the day before; and I tell it you for the sake of telling it, and because I need your pity. Write to me, and tell me about yourself: it will distract me. But no! that is false, too! You know but too well that nothing, nobody, can distract me from the one, only, thing that interests me. Therefore, write about *us*. It comforts a sick man most to be talked to about his sickness. But don't prescribe a remedy: it's no use: there is none: and if I knew of one, I should refuse to take it."

Teissier, in his folly, was not so clear-sighted as he imagined. If he was capable of seeing himself, and looking into the future, he was blind to what was going on close to him. Suzanne was crushed, and fading away under one of those sorrows that throw their black palls over everything. Her footsteps dragged so wearily, her face wore such a look of suffering, her whole attitude bore such signs of a gnawing grief, that she seemed to throw a shadow of melancholy around her. Above all, she seemed to have lost interest in her home, whose cares she shirked, and in her social duties, which she neglected, in her husband's work, and even in her children. Laurel's merry laugh failed to brighten her, and she no longer tried to rouse Annie from her pensive fits of silence. Every now and then, one or other of the little girls would ask her, "Are you ill, mamma?" And, for answer, she would press them to her, while a sudden rush of tenderness would fill her eyes with tears. Once, Annie said to her, suddenly, in one of those curious fits of intuition that children have, guessing almost what they cannot understand,—

"You must not die, mamma."

And Suzanne kissed her hair and murmured—

"Would that I could!"

Their intimate friends and the *habitués* of the

house, without guessing the cause, saw what Michael was so blind to. It made them uneasy, and they gossiped about it among themselves. The love, the brightness, the happiness, of the Teissier household had always been a subject of surprise and admiration to them, and they had unconsciously enjoyed the good humour, the restfulness, the cordiality, of the domestic atmosphere in the house in the Rue de St. George. All that was now gone. A sense of constraint had crept even into the little downstairs sitting-room. One day, someone, either De Thornes or Peyraud, said to Michael:

"Is anything the matter with Mde. Teissier? She seems ill."

"No: nothing. Why should there be?"

And, indeed, what did ail her poor, wounded, stricken heart?

Suzanne was a broken woman from the day that the truth had been forced upon her. All her illusions crumbled to atoms. To see that man, the model of virtue, at the feet of a young girl! It was monstrous! At the moment she was so shocked by the depths of vice and hypocrisy that she saw in him, that a feeling of horror made her recoil in silence, and close the door on the two lovers, as though to hide their shame out of her

sight. But during the long fit of lonely agony in which she had to stifle even her sobs, she felt the awakening in her, one by one, of feelings that, at first, had been overshadowed by disgust. Pangs of growing jealousy, and wounded vanity, which, even if they lessened her grief, made it bitterer, and added a touch of egotism, hate, and cruelty to her despair. As she thought it over she got nearer the truth. She became aware how peculiar a tie existed between Blanche and Michael, all the stronger, probably, from the fact that it was not, as yet, a guilty one, and that their struggle against themselves only made it closer. It angered her less, but pained her more, to think so, and paralyzed her power of coming to any decision. Indeed, what could she do? Go away? It would leave the field open to them. And then there were her children, the habits of a lifetime, the last poor shreds of love and hope, the unbearable feeling that she would not be regretted, to consider. She might make a scene: stand upon her rights as wife and mother, insist upon a separation! But suppose they refused: what would she have gained by complaining? Why add a fresh and a public humiliation to the one which she now had to submit to in private? Better ignore everything and keep silence.

So Suzanne kept silence, with a breaking heart

and an aching head, using what little strength she had left to control her manner, to live her daily life, to greet Michael's return with a friendly smile of which he never guessed the sad significance; to hold out her hand to Blanche, when she saw she came in search of her husband. She kept silence, because she had sacrificed her whole inner nature, or thought she had. She kept silence, but not willingly, and torn oftentimes by conflicting feelings. At times she bore up against her sorrow, and sought comfort by saying to herself, "There are others worse off than I: I have my children." At other times words of despair would rise to her lips: "What use are the children? It's all over, all over! My life is done!" Or else she asked, with an anxiety tinged ever so little with a lingering hope, "Will he *never* see that I know all, and that it is killing me? Is he so blind as not to know that I am dying?" Or else, "Are all the ties that once bound me to him, our love, our common interests, our joys, our sorrows,—are they all so utterly broken that not one is left to hold him? My God! will he never come back to me, touched by the past, by duty, or even by pity?" And she would watch for some sign of affection; but when it came she scarcely cared for it. One unbearable thought poisoned her joy, and ruth-

lessly killed all hope. "Yes: no doubt, he does keep second place in his heart for me. But he gives me only what she allows him to, what she does not want herself."

Through all her pain and grief, Suzanne felt a sort of indulgence for her husband, and made excuses for him. But she hated Blanche, with a growing hatred which she justified and increased by dwelling on the sufferings of her self-love, which were even keener and harder to bear than those of her heart. Who was this girl, that she should be preferred to her? She was no prettier, no more intelligent, no cleverer, than numbers of others. Why, then, had he singled Her out from among her betters, from all the crowd that were attracted by his glamour, power, and fame? After each of his speeches, he was accustomed to receive from all quarters letters, some confidential, some boldly admiring. He often showed them to Suzanne, and she used to think then, "He does not care for them, because he loves me." Ah! It was because he loved Her!

Then new questions would surge up in her. Since when was this love? For how many months or years had her husband ceased to belong to her? And she would do her best to recollect, and by comparing, to guess, and get to the bottom of it all.

But the more she recalled, the more desperate she grew. For a moment she had tried to persuade herself that it was only a passing fancy. But she saw it was not so. It was an overpowering love, and as unaccountable as all great passions are. Michael did not care for Blanche for any special reason: neither for her eyes nor for her hair, neither her grace nor for her cleverness. He loved her simply because he loved her. And there was something peculiarly exasperating to Suzanne in this very intangibility; for with what weapons was she to meet it? How was she to get hold of it, overpowering, deaf, blind, as she knew it to be, and as inevitable as Fate? "If she had only been worthy of it!" she kept repeating.

She would not, or could not, see any merit in Her. All of us are worthy of the love that we receive as well as of the love we give, for in every soul lie hidden treasures that love only can unearth. Those which Blanche possessed, those which, like the golden sands of the legendary river, had attracted and delighted Michael, and held him enthralled, Suzanne could not see. She regarded her rival as a vulgar intriguer, who had stolen her husband's love only to gratify her own vanity by dragging the great man at her chariot-wheels. She did not love him for his own sake—how

should she? She never had known him when he was poor, humble, and obscure.

These thoughts, and others like them, which throbbed through her poor head as she lay awake o' nights, brought to Suzanne a sort of evil consolation. She became a prey to ill-feeling of all sorts. She liked to think that Michael was being duped, and was not loved as he fancied he was. She loved to gloat over the sadness and torture of their love, over their baulked meetings, over the innumerable obstacles that lay in their path, over the unsatisfied cravings of their love, over all the constraint and self-sacrifice that they had to endure on account of her, over the lies that scorched their lips. But even this evil comfort failed her at last. "After all," she said, "they are happy." And she fell back, despairingly, on the one great question, How would it all end? or tried to solve for herself the vague and puzzling problem that startles all of us with fear in the midst of peace, which robs us of our loved ones, and then reconciles us to our transitory woe by, "It can't last for ever!" She sometimes conjured up a picture of Michael coming back to her, after some terrible awakening, humbled, crushed, bleeding, and confessing everything to her. Sometimes she would say, gently, "I have long known it; I forgive

you." At other times she would spurn him, for the pleasure of seeing him suffer in his turn, alone, and unhappy. "It was your own wish, your own fault; and you must pay for it. How can I do anything for you? My heart is dead—you killed it."

Yes: as she performed her habitual tasks, in all the punctual routine of her daily life, while attending to her housewifely duties, while receiving her guests, and conversing with them, in society, at the theatre, as she tucked her little ones into bed, and romped with them, Suzanne's thoughts ran on all these things, and on many others madder, crueller, and gentler. What eye could have read them in that limpid look, in the seeming calmness of that brow? Love only could have done it, and Michael's was hers no longer. But occasionally when she showed by her dejected attitude how much she was suffering, and how absorbed by sad thoughts, she would have a sudden re-awakening of tenderness. If Annie took her hand, and asked her in her pitying little way, "Are you ill, Mamma?" or when Laurel, perchance, stood on tiptoe to kiss her. . . .

But the day came when, for no reason in particular, the storm broke suddenly.

Teissier had had a most trying week in the

Chamber. The discussion on the Budget was in full swing. For a moment, the defeat of the Ministry, on the vote for Public Worship, seemed imminent.

But the democratic majority held together. After a three-days' struggle, with alternating success, the attack of the combined Conservative Party was defeated by a slender majority. Michael had stood in the breach without taking one hour's rest, displaying as much activity and energy as if his whole heart was in the debate; yet inwardly trembling lest the success of his tactics should lay fresh burdens on him, perchance the absorbing cares of office, stealing from him his few spare moments of happiness. He held on his way, busily, nervously, restlessly, mastering his apprehension by a strong effort of will. And alone among all the onlookers of the fray did Suzanne guess that he was unmoved by all those great issues, which he discussed with his powerful voice and telling gestures; that budget and ministries, the defeat or the triumph of his Party, weighed but little on his mind; that he only threw himself into the thick of the fight to try and forget his gnawing pain; that even at the decisive moment, when he stood in the midst of unloosed human passions, which surged round him like a tempest

round a tossing ship, he had no thoughts but for Her, always Her, nothing but Her.

On the Saturday, after making a final effort, and being defeated, Michael returned home, pleased with himself for having done his best to the last, and yet glad at being beaten without having any failure of duty wherewith to reproach himself. He was utterly worn out with fatigue, and unfit to think of anything but the sensation of relief from the long strain, and the delight of being able to rest.

The children were in the little sitting-room with their mother. He kissed Annie laughingly, took Laurel on his knee, and playing with her curls, called out, cheerily,—

"It's all over! and it's about time it was! Now I can sleep the whole night through, and do nothing to-morrow!"

"You must need it," said Suzanne, drily.

There was a moment's silence, which Michael broke by resuming, in an off-hand tone:

"By the way, I met Blanche just now, and asked her to come and spend Sunday with us."

Such invitations had been of common occurrence before Suzanne's awakening.

Since she knew all, she had swallowed her feelings and put up with them. Why, then, this

day of all others, could she no longer repress her feeling of rebellion? Annie, who was very fond of the young girl, began clapping her hands. In a moment Suzanne lost all control of herself, and hastily and angrily exclaimed—

"I don't choose to have her here!"

She had hardly uttered the words when she saw their full meaning. She sent away the children hastily, telling them that dinner was nearly ready. When she was alone with her husband she paused.

"What do you mean—you don't choose?" asked Michael, affecting an air of surprise, and controlling his strong emotion. "Why, what's the matter?"

She rose and walked straight up to him.

"What's the matter?" she answered in a quivering voice, and looking at him from head to foot. "You ask me what's the matter?"

The knitting of her brow, her pallor, the look of almost hate which flashed across her face, told Michael that the fatal hour had come at last. Controlling himself, and summoning all his coolness, he replied, in a firm voice, still pursuing, instinctively, the lying course which was the only one that occurred to him:

"I don't know what you mean."

She stopped him.

"Don't say any more. You would only lie, and it would be useless. I know all!"

He still tried to hold his ground.

"All? But there is nothing to know! Nothing: I swear to you!"

Again she interrupted him.

"Be silent! I saw you! It's some time ago, now! The day that Mondet came. She was sitting there, in that very arm-chair, and you—you were at her feet; she was fondling your hair, and you were saying—things—when—I opened the door. I saw you both, and I walked out again. You neither of you heard anything: you had forgotten everything. And yet, within a few yards of me, and of your children . . . ."

Michael grew pale as she spoke. No falsehood was of any avail against the evidence of her own eyes. He felt it, and tried another tack.

"Be calm," he said. "I will lie no more: I have done so too often already, and I am sick of it! Don't throw it in my teeth! I did it for your sake!"

Suzanne was going to break in; but he silenced her with a gesture, and continued:

"It was for your sake, and to spare you pain as long as possible. Yes—pain that we could not avert—we lied for your sake—I repeat, and that

is not the only sacrifice that we had made to you. We love each other, it is true; but there it ends. Do you understand me? We both know that we never can be anything more to each other."

Suzanne smiled contemptuously.

"You are not her lover? That's what you wish me to understand—isn't it?" she cried. "But what matters that to me? I had a thousand times rather that you were, for then you would love her less! If that's all you have to say in your defence! Believe me, it is not of the slightest use trying to justify yourself, or to exonerate her. It is quite impossible—do not let us talk of it, I beg. Only, I should like to know what you mean to do? for I am sure you will see that things can't go on as they are. Human endurance has its limits; and I have suffered so much already that I can bear it no longer! It is your turn to do so now!"

Suzanne sank into an arm-chair, with her face in her hands, while Michael agitatedly paced up and down the little room.

"I will do whatever you wish, Suzanne," he said, gently, seating himself opposite his wife.

She looked at him distrustfully.

"Yes," he said: "I will do whatever you wish. I cannot tell you how it hurts me to see you suffering. Poor child! do you suppose I have

never thought of the time when you would know all, and that I have not gone through all the agony beforehand? Ah! if it is only my happiness that you begrudge me, you may be quite easy. I am enjoying none—I never have enjoyed any. For months past I have lived in a continual state of torture, both of heart and of conscience, despising and hating myself, and in utter despair; trembling at the thought of the final rupture, of seeing you suffer for my fault, for me,—and yet I am powerless to do anything."

At these words, Suzanne shrugged her shoulders.

"Powerless to do anything!" she repeated bitterly. "That's always the way cowards have of excusing themselves. To begin with, you need not have fallen in love with her: you might have stopped yourself in time by giving up seeing her, and avoiding her, and you would have done so if you had ever given me a thought. But you counted on my being blinder than I am: so you gave in, lulling your conscience by telling yourself, 'I will lie to her—she will never know, and that's the main thing.' Well, you were out in your calculations, my dear. I know all, and it only remains now for us to decide what is to be done."

As Michael said nothing, she went on,—

"Yes: something must be done; but what? Have you ever thought it out? Have you ever asked yourself what course you would offer to me, when we should be where we are? I suppose not. You doubtless counted on my amiability, on my weakness. But I have ceased to be amiable, and don't intend to be weak. All these weeks I have been possessed by but one idea, and one sorrow; and it has changed me. I have ceased to be amiable, and don't want to be so. Others must suffer as well as I. It can't go on! We cannot live together—you, with your lies, and I with my sorrow. It is impossible. We had better look things in the face, and agree to separate."

Michael, who had again began pacing to and fro, stopped in front of her.

"It cannot be," he said. "You know it can't. You are talking nonsense!"

"Oh! I forget!" said Suzanne ironically. "There's your position, your Party, your place, your newspaper, your reputation for spotless rectitude, to be considered. But it scarcely seems to me the moment to consider them, and *I* shall certainly not do so."

"Neither shall I, whatever you may think. It is not they that stand in the way. I was thinking only of our children, Suzanne, and of you."

"Me! I'm to be thought of—am I?"

"You are still my wife, Suzanne; and all the ties of my life, my youth, my affections——"

She stopped him, scornfully.

"Be cautious! If you don't take care, you will say you still love me!" adding vehemently, "Liar!"

Michael went on, very gently.

"Yes: I possibly *might* tell you that I love you, and yet it would not be a falsehood. I do not love you as you want to be loved. I love you differently, better perhaps; and you know it. You know as well as I there is a tie between us that nothing can break—a bond of the warmest affection and regard. Yes, Suzanne: I love you, in spite of all my faults, in spite of what you have just said to me, in spite of everything!"

She listened—and hope revived in her: one of the vain hopes that grow in spite of all evidence.

"Then, what about that girl?" she said. "Do you not love her? Tell me that you don't love her—that you never did—and I will believe you, even yet. Tell me that it was a passing fancy and that it is all over."

Her tone was one of weak supplication, seeking woman-like, to be convinced, no matter how, and to escape, even by a fresh lie, from the inexorable logic of the situation, which began to frighten her.

"No," said Michael, with a grave sadness: "I cannot tell you that. The time for truth has come, and we must face it all. I love her too."

There was a long pause, full of unuttered thoughts. Then Teissier began again, slowly, painfully:

"Still, if either of you must be sacrificed, it will not be you; you know that; she has no rights, and you have."

"Don't say that!" protested Suzanne. And, in a low voice, full of repressed feeling, she went on:

"I don't want you to stay with me because it's your duty—do you hear? I don't want to keep you in spite of yourself. No! no! I shan't hold you back by main force. I would wish you to understand you are free! You can go!"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Those are only words—words. I am not free; even if I wished to, I could not, and I would not, go; it is only your self-love that makes you speak to me like that, and I must beg you to stop. It is beside the question: we are concerned with other, and graver, matters. Is it impossible for you to believe that I may even still be honest? I have been weak, I allow, and have been carried away by my heart. Yet I *did* resist—and I know

my duty to you: you must not be allowed to suffer for my fault."

"It is too late," murmured Suzanne: "it is too late. I have gone through too much already."

"Especially," continued Michael, "do I wish to prevent the children suffering for me. I never would have allowed it, even at the height of my folly. I felt it would be unfair, and impossible. She, too, felt it. Can't you understand that it should be so? Do you think it is any harder for you to sacrifice your resentment than for us to do what we have done?"

Suzanne did not seem to hear what he said. Her sight was all introspective now.

"I?" she said, in the tone of painful irony that she had kept up all through the interview. "Oh! I understand nothing! Such things are far too deep for *me!* All I know, my dear, is that you have got to choose, now, between Her and me—Her and me! The time has come that you must decide."

Again Michael remained silent. He was quite collected and calm, and was determined to thresh it out now, once for all, without dissimulation or subterfuge.

"She, too," he began at last, gently, "is part of my life. I cannot give her up at a moment's

notice. I have not moral courage enough. If I did, I should be a sneak. I must have time. Little by little, the violence of our feeling for each other would die away, and become a mere friendship, an openly avowed friendship, and then——"

Suzanne interrupted him angrily :

"You only want more time for love-making!" she said. "More time! Nice enough for you, I daresay ; but death to me. No, no : we will have no half-measures! I have borne it as long as I can, and I will put up with it no longer."

Michael thought for a moment.

"But I cannot drop her all at once like that," he muttered, more in answer to his own thoughts than to his wife's words.

Suzanne took him up sharply.

"Then, do you mean to leave *me?*"

"If *she* asked me to choose," he said, "can you doubt what my answer would be? But she would never ask me!"

"Naturally not! She is nothing to you, at all. She knows perfectly well that what you give her is mine, and that she is robbing me of it. How ashamed she ought to be, if she has any pride in her!"

"She knows it, she feels it, and yet she loves me. Have you no pity for her, you—a good woman?"

"Pity! Pity, because you love her? because she has stolen you from me and my children? See here, Michael: you are not talking like a sane man. You are blinded, led away. How little you know women! How little you know me! One would think that, in spite of all the years we have lived together, you have never taken the trouble to learn my character. You argue and discuss as if you were talking to a lump of ice. But, you see, I don't listen to you. I cannot argue or discuss: I am not in a state to do either. I can only ask you to choose between her and me—Her and me!"

When he began to perceive that all his efforts were useless against her stubborn will, which he was astonished to find so much firmer than his own, Michael felt a blind rage surging up within him: the rage of the strong when they feel they are in the wrong, and instinctively fall back on brute force as a final argument.

"Take care, Suzanne," he growled, menacingly.

"Are you trying to threaten me now?" she cried. "Do you dare to threaten me? You? You?"

He was ashamed, and drew back.

"I am not threatening you," he answered, lowering his tone. "I know you have all the right on your side. But I was tired when I came in. I am

worn out. I implore you to be reasonable, to try and understand, and not to try my patience too far."

She saw her advantage, and pursued it.

"Not to try your patience too far? Then, it is *you* who are the victim, and *I* the executioner? It is I who have deceived you? It is I who have lied?"

"Once more," he said, "I wish to say that you have done me no wrong, and it is I only who am guilty. But we are not enemies, in spite of what has passed between us. On the contrary, we are two friends, two partners, if you will, who are threatened by a common danger. We must combine to resist it. We must come to some arrangement, some mutual agreement, howsoever hard it may be. You must not forget that we have children!"

"So you remember it?"

Without noticing the interruption, he went on:

"It is for them that we must live, first of all. They must not suffer from our dissensions, or our passions."

Again she interrupted him drily:

"From *yours*. I have none."

"I have sacrificed much to them, already; and

I will give up more, and more utterly. But be patient, I beg of you. Do not take advantage of your position, and ask me to do something beyond my powers! For then you, too, would be responsible for what might happen."

"Again I repeat that there is no question about what I may do," said Suzanne. "No act of mine is separating us; it is you. It was you who deceived, you who could not be satisfied with family love: you who have shattered our home, you who sought happiness elsewhere! I bore it in silence as long as I could. I would have gone on bearing it if I had been able. Only, I couldn't. Was I to blame? Why must I be stronger to bear with evil-doing than you to avoid it? If I were a saint, I might; but I'm not."

She paused for a moment, and began again, in a softer voice.

"All that I can do, Michael, will be to forgive you, in time, when we have got farther from all this. Yes: I will forgive you, for the children's sake, for my own; for I could not live and hate. I will forget—one forgets everything in time—and then, perhaps—perhaps we may yet be happy."

"Happy!" he said, in a tone that betrayed his feelings.

He was sorry the next moment, for he saw he had wounded Suzanne.

"What does it matter, after all?" she went on, with knitted brow. "We shan't be happy, then. But we were not talking of happiness. You must see for yourself, you must feel, howsoever much you try to persuade yourself to the contrary, that your proper place is here. Your duty is clear, clear as noonday. You cannot leave us—us, whose whole life and future depends on you. It is She you must leave. It is no use saying that you have not got the moral courage to do it. You must have it, because it is your duty to have it."

Michael had almost ceased to struggle, won over, in spite of himself, by arguments that were enforced by all that was honest and true in him; yet he could not get out the words she asked for.

"Listen to me, Suzanne," he said. "Let us stop, now, I beseech you; and think over matters till to-morrow. I can't do it now: I am worn out. We will find some solution, some way out——"

"Oh, no!" she said impatiently. "No more thinking for me! I have been thinking for a month past. It is killing work, and does no good. Come, make up your mind at once! Choose! and stay with us!"

Teissier made a despairing gesture. Then, after a pause—

"No: I *cannot*, and *will* not, promise anything," he said. "She must be told what has occurred. Her future is at stake, too, and she must be consulted!" So saying, he left the room, and Suzanne did not venture to stop him.

PART II.

THE following letters passed rapidly between Teissier, Blanche, and Suzanne, in the thirty-six hours subsequent to the scene which we have just described.—

Michael to Blanche

(Written immediately after his interview with Suzanne):

"Don't come to-morrow, Blanche. Our secret has been discovered by the one person in the world from whom it ought to have been hidden. I think it best to let you know this at once. Forgive me if I pain you by doing so; but I do not see any way of putting it that would alter the fact. I foresaw it must come some day, and have often thought over what would then be best to do. But none of the courses that have suggested

themselves seem applicable to the case. And yet, the time has come——

"Do not despair, or lose heart. We must be brave, for the danger is on us. No situation is so desperate but what it can be overcome, if honestly and loyally faced. I, myself, feel braver for being rid of the falsehood that weighed on us. I suffered from it so cruelly that I should feel almost glad to have thrown it off, did I not know the sorrow we are causing, and the dangers that are ahead. One above all, the very thought of which I put away from me. I must not lose you, Blanche: you are mine, and I will fight for you to the last.

"What is going to happen? I can't say. I had a most terrible scene with Suzanne yesterday. But she won't continue long in her present state of mind. I know her well enough to be sure of that.

"The more I think it over, the less able am I to see what is best to be done. But I think you must write to her. Yes, you had better. Tell her everything, with the utmost frankness. She is right-minded, and will, perhaps, see that we are, to the full, as unhappy as she is. In any case, she will then know what she ought to know: that our love is not a haphazard one, begotten of vacant hearts; but the absorbing affection of two human beings,

the very strength and permanency, and nature of which are its own justification. It may hurt her more, at first; but her pain will be of the nobler sort, free from the baser pangs of self-love; and the wound will heal, leaving no scar behind. She knows already that, for her sake, we had given up all hope, and that you have never been, and would never be, more to me than a friend—a loved friend. This I told her, and she believed me: she knows I will not deceive her again.

"Blanche, darling Blanche! I feel as if we could have gone on for ever loving each other as we did the other day, without wanting anything more, so long as we were together, and united in spite of people and things that keep us asunder. But now all that dream of happiness in store has vanished; and my spirit quails within me.

"I cannot, I *will* not, think that we must give up seeing each other; for that is what she insists on. I could not do it: it would kill me. I cannot contemplate life without you—you are my very self!

"I will write to her, myself, to-morrow morning. Just now, I do not feel as if I could; and on that letter everything will depend. Heaven grant me the power to do it aright! How am I to pour balm into her poor, wounded heart, when I can

only tell her the plain truth: that I cannot love her, because I love *you?* How can I lie to her again? I can't: nor would she believe me! Then, what am I to say?

"Good-bye! Let us stand by each other for our love's sake.

MICHAEL."

Michael to Suzanne:

"I do not know, Suzanne, what *you* think of *me;* but even after our interview of yesterday, I still look on you, and always shall, as my best friend, and it is to my friend that I would write this.

"I need not pretend to be surprised that you are wounded to the quick. Still, I think that when I have faithfully, and fully, confessed everything to you, and you know all there is to know, your sorrow and anger will both be less keen.

"You will tell me, probably, that after what has occurred, and what you, yourself, have seen, you are justified in doubting my word. Well, not necessarily. It is true that I have lied to you, and deceived you; but yet I am neither a liar nor a hypocrite. You know me well enough to be aware of how painful it must have been to

me to play such a part. If I remained silent and did not tell you (like friend to friend, as I was often tempted to do, and now regret I did not), believe me, it was neither from lack of feeling, or that I might selfishly go on leading my double existence, undisturbed. It was for *your* sake, and for your sake only. Yes, dear: I wanted to spare you pain. Having weakly yielded to the temptation of a guilty love (though not *so* guilty as you probably suppose), I persuaded myself that the only way to palliate my sin was to conceal it. Yes: hypocrisy seemed almost a virtue; and it cost me far more to play the double part than it would have cost to tell you everything. In saying this, I want to show you, that, though I may have deceived you up to now, you would be wrong in supposing that I wish to continue doing so. The time for deception is past, and (you will scarcely believe it; but, in spite of the painfulness of my present position, in spite of my agony and remorse) I feel relieved from a terrible weight. Let us make an end of all duplicity! If anything can save us now, it is absolute truthfulness. No matter what the result may be, we must come to a straightforward understanding. To act honestly and for the best is my only desire.

"I hardly think I need tell you that Blanche

has never been more to me than you know of. She never would or could be. Howsoever deeply we may have erred towards you, I do not suppose you could have any serious misgivings on this subject. Still, it is better to tell you I love her deeply, and am deeply loved by her. We are united by a bond as close as is possible between two people kept apart by the laws of God and man; all the closer, perhaps, from the very obstacles in its way. No other tie exists between us. We have nothing graver to reproach ourselves with than those few kisses. No doubt it would have been nobler to have kept our love pure even from them. We know that; but we are neither of us saints, and, if we have not been so strong as we might have been, neither have we been so weak.

"I could not endure to discuss the details of how first I began to love her, even if I would. It would serve no good purpose. By the time I became aware of my passion it had already gone too far to be stemmed. But my feeling for her has never trenched upon the affection that I bear you. Alas! I fear I only wound you by saying so! 'Affection,' you will say: 'why not Love?' I know not, dear. But after loving you, you know *how* well, my feeling gradually changed to a steady,

strong affection, that seems to me better worth having. On thinking it over, this appears the normal result of a happy marriage. When the course of love runs smooth it loses some of its more salient characteristics. The majority of men and women accept this natural transformation as a matter of course. I thought I had done so myself; but I was wrong; and, unfortunately, I perceived my mistake too late. But what's the use of talking about it? The mischief is done, and it is waste of time to try and explain it. We have, first of all, to find a remedy.

"I almost think you would forgive us if you knew what tortures we have undergone, and the bitter fruit our love has borne us hitherto. Believe me, you have nothing to be jealous of, as far as that goes!

"I am no mere man of pleasure, as you know: I have never succeeded in ridding myself totally of my moral sense. As soon, therefore, as I became aware of the true nature of the feeling that had grown up unawares, under the cloak of an almost fatherly affection, and that I saw that all my efforts were powerless to control it, I perceived my full guilt, and suffered the mental torture of one smitten by a mortal disease.

"I at first strove to conquer it with all my

power, hiding it from my own sight like a sore. I fancy I went at times perilously near to madness, tossed, as I was, from one extreme of feeling to another: now upborne by unreasoning hope, and then plunged back into the agonies of despair.

"If my confession is to be full and complete, and you are to be left with no lingering suspicion of my honesty, I must lay bare to you the mad schemes that suggested themselves to me. I had fits of mania, in which I thought that if she loved me we would run away together; and I felt a guilty pleasure in thinking out all the romantic details. Then, too, I confess, I thought of getting a divorce; and it required all my good sense fully to realize the odiousness of the idea. For months together, by day, by night, during my daily occupations and work, while speaking or writing, while playing with the children, or while with you, I thought of nothing else. I had ceased to be my own master, and had become the slave of a grinding tyranny external to myself. Now and then, too, I was maddened by sudden panics. For instance, do you remember last year that the question of Blanche's marriage cropped up? Well, I lived in terror about it. I saw, in my mind's eye, the marriage ceremony, at which I could not avoid being present. I saw her in her wedding dress. I imagined her laying

her hand in another's. Yet, you may recall, I did not raise a finger to prevent the plan being carried out. Guilty I may be, I know; but I know, too, that I have been well punished. The heart that led me astray has been also my cruellest scourge.

"In a moment of madness my secret escaped me. I do not think that Blanche cared for me then. How should she? But she saw how in earnest and unhappy I was, and she pitied me. Pity is the rock most women split on. Instead of repelling me, she thought, in her innocence, to stanch the wound she had, unknowingly, inflicted. Unfortunately, the disease is an infectious one. She fell, in her turn, a victim, and descended into my Hades to share my tortures with me.

"I blush for my weakness, and loathe myself when I compare it with her nobleness and generosity. She quietly, without a struggle, sacrificed her whole future for my sake, surrendering the end and aim of a woman's life. She knows as well as I do what the nature of the only tie between us can be. More than once I have been unworthy enough to hint to her something of my mad plans. She silenced me at once. We both of us knew they were impracticable. I felt they were, though I pretended to believe in them. We never would have consented to purchase our own happiness at

the expense of so much undeserved suffering to others. We never lost sight of the fact that you and the children stood in the way of the realization of our dreams. You must always bear that in mind. I don't think I ever felt those ties so strongly as when I was pursued most by the idea of possibly shaking them off. She felt the same, and was quite content with the poor little modest, unobtrusive, unacknowledged part of my life: that was all she could claim. All she hoped for was to be able to keep it for ever, as we used sometimes to say.

"But all that is over now. The false position we were in no longer exists, and what is to be done?

"How am I to choose, Suzanne, between the affection that unites, and the love that divides, us? It will depend on you. You have the power, as you have the right, to compel us to your will. But are you going to be less generous than she? Will you refuse her the modest place she is content to fill? Do you still insist on my making the sacrifice which at first I shrank from facing in its completeness? Think it over, dear. You are mistress of *our* fate as well as *yours*. Do not exact too much, I implore you, nor strain beyond endurance the right which I am the first to acknow-

ledge. Think it well over, let me beg of you, and don't answer until you are calmer, and in so far juster. I never meant to threaten you yesterday, when I angered you so by saying 'Take care.' I only wanted to warn you of the difficulties that your excessive severity or masterfulness might create for all of us.

"I might say a good deal more to you; but what's the use? I have told you what it is right you should know, and it ought to suffice to remove from your mind all doubts of my sincerity, and even, in spite of everything, of my affection.

MICHAEL."

Blanche to Suzanne:

"I would fain have spared you the knowledge of our unfortunate secret, even at the expense of my own dignity and peace of mind. But, since you have found it out for yourself, it affords me unspeakable relief to throw off my mask and appear in my true character. Guilty and unhappy I *am*, but not a hypocrite, in spite of appearances.

"I did all I could to keep it from you. As long as you knew nothing your peace and happiness were not interfered with. So, not to dispel

your dream of happiness (for it was nothing more), I lied, I deceived, I schemed, as if lying, scheming, and dissimulation were natural to me. I had to play a part before you as best I could. We did not want you to be pained on our account: so we resigned ourselves to the necessary falsehood, as if it were a positive duty. You, who know us both so well, can guess—can you not?—what an inward struggle it cost us, and how cruel an expiation it has been.

"I feel so guilty when I think of it all!

"You took to your bosom a little orphan girl, practically homeless, for her mother did not want her. You became a mother to her, and, later on, as she grew up, and the difference in years was less marked, an elder sister. Your love made her feel at home by your dear, hospitable hearth, round which all her best memories centre. But for you, how sad and forlorn her girlhood would have been! Thanks to you, it was sheltered and tended and almost happy. You lavished every token of confidence on her; you gave her your friendship, and were entitled to count on her love and gratitude; and how has she repaid your goodness?

"Yes: it's an ugly story. One looks in vain for extenuating circumstances. The more one knows, the worse it seems. And you may well

ask yourself how it came that the girl, whom you brought up, and thought you had made truthful and honest, and affectionate, could, for a whole year, and in cold blood, play the hateful part of which you are the victim.

"What can I tell you about it all? Michael pitied me when he saw me alone in the world. I do not know how the nature of his feelings came to change. He never told me, and now I seem always to have cared for him deep down in my heart. A word sufficed to wake my dormant love, and it grew, all at once, too strong to resist. Is it my fault if Michael is the noblest being I have ever seen? If you knew how I pined for affection! It was *so* sweet to be loved; and *so* foolish! for I knew I had nothing to hope for but this shame, and this despair!

"I am going away: so I shall no longer stand in your path. You will forget me, and so will Michael. One always ends by forgetting. Little by little memory of me will fade out of your thoughts. It will only seem like a bad dream; and after long years you will forget everything but the time when we were dear friends; and, perhaps, you will come to think less ill of me.

"Perhaps, too,—I comfort myself by thinking,—there may still be some happiness before you,—

after a time—when peace and pardon shall have entered your heart. Yours is the happier lot, for you have forgiveness and hope left to you. Mine is to go hence—alone once more—to face my shame and remorse as best I can. You will have your home, and your children—and your husband will return to you. But, Suzanne, I implore you, do not repel him too harshly. I fear to wound you by saying this; but I *must* do it, for all our sakes. His love is still too present to him not to need some consideration. You might drive him to desperation by—perchance—speaking ill of me to him; and then God knows what might happen!

"I have thought it all over. This crisis was sure to come, and, when the first dreadful shock is past, we shall feel almost as if we had gone safely through a dangerous operation. Painful it must be; but what a relief to have it over! What a mercy to have done, for ever, with Falsehood!

"My darling mother by adoption! Let us try not to hate each other! True, a grave misfortune has overtaken us, and one of us must give way to the other; and so—I am going. But I cannot bear to take with me the bitter thought that I have destroyed the happiness of both your lives

—and, by loving Michael overmuch, have left him for ever loveless, and his hearth desolate. Surely he deserves better than that, Suzanne? I beg you to think rather of him than of ourselves, and so not to punish him unduly.

"Would that I could mingle *my* love and my pity, and my remorse, with *your* tenderness and pardon; making of it a living fountain, in which to lave and purify his soul, till nought was left in it but peace and joy. I would give him of our best, and beautify his life with all that is noblest in a woman's heart: to wit, gentleness and pity. But I know this is not for me to do. *You* only can undertake the task, Suzanne; and your noble heart, crushed though it be, will help you to accomplish it.

"But, first of all, you must forgive, frankly and freely. You *will* forgive. I know you will. For, after all, our poor love's greatest sin is—that it is. There is nothing that a wife cannot forgive in that. I promise you I will disappear out of his life; and if by my self-sacrifice I atone, ever so little, for the harm I have done, if it brings to him, and restores to you, some of your former happiness, I shall feel I am rewarded, and almost forgiven.

BLANCHE ESTÈVE."

Blanche to Michael:

"What is to be done? What *can* be done? The moment has come at last; and my misery is a thousand times greater than I thought it could be! Don't forsake me, Michael: never forsake me, or what will become of me? If I could only see you and speak to you for a moment, I should be calmer, and better able to see what must be done. But I can't collect my thoughts: I feel bowed down with shame, and as if I could never raise my head again. Not that I am ashamed of loving you. I am not; but I blush for all the hypocrisy that we have bemeaned ourselves to for so long. All our falsehoods stand up against me. They strangle me, and poison my wounds. How much simpler and nobler it would have been to have told the truth from the first! But, if we had, Suzanne would have suffered,—and you too. Heaven knows we thought we were acting for the best! And yet it was all in vain. Suzanne is paying for our sin. Of course, she despises us, and can never know how we fought against ourselves, and tasted nothing but misery.

"Still, she is good; and when the first feeling of despair has passed away, she will, I hope, forgive us, and perhaps pity.

"I am going away, Michael, to Lyons, to my friends the S——s, who invited me there some time ago. I will take means to disappear, entirely, out of your life. But it cannot be done all at once, as I am sure you will see. I have certain people, and things, to consider. My mother knows, and *must* know, nothing.

"You must remain, Michael, and not try to follow me, or write to me. Dear, dear, friend, you know that the sacrifice must be made if you are to win back the esteem and affection of your wife. Ah! you are much luckier than I! That thought comforts me somewhat. Your duties as a public man will distract your mind, and prevent you thinking of other things—and you have your children. I loved the little things for your sake, and now I will never see them grow up! I think they loved me, too, and will, possibly, wonder why I don't come any longer. May they never know such hours of misery as we are undergoing!

"I shall be lonely, oh! so lonely, when you are no longer by my side! My courage fails when I think of it, and I feel tempted to cry aloud, 'Come to me, come! and we will fly together—somewhere far away—where we can be happy!'

"You see how weak I am. I have nothing of the heroine about me, Michael. I am in pain and

want to be petted, like a child. Yet, though I am saying all this, from my old habit of telling you everything, in reality nothing would induce me to go away with you. Remorse would poison our happiness, and, perhaps, kill our love. And I would not have it die. I want to keep it alive, and unsullied, to the very end. It is all that my life contains of best and noblest; it has become my only hope now, and hereafter. I never really believed in a Higher Power until you loved me, and now I could not conceive of Time ending our love, or Eternity, without it. My grief brings all such things nearer to me than formerly. God comforts the sorrowful, they say; and, if I trust in Him, He will, perhaps, give me strength and courage to endure your absence, my aching loneliness, and the void of silence that must hide it all. For I must not write to you again. You will hear of me in the usual way, through my mother, or our common friends. We must surrender these little pleasures if Suzanne is to be made easy in her mind, and be convinced that there is nothing between us—nothing but the love that distance cannot kill.

"Dear friend, my heart is brimming over with memories of those sweet times that can never be again. I ought to end my letter. I have written

all I wanted you to know, and all I ought to tell you. But I can't! These are the last dying words of our love: never again shall I pour out my heart to you, and, with the folding up of this page, our separation becomes final and irreparable.

"Do you remember my first letter, where I said, 'Henceforth, what matter whether life be good or ill? I shall have had my share of youth and happiness, enough, anyhow, to brighten dark days if they come; so I shall have nothing to complain of.'

"The dark days have come, Michael, and I am not going to complain. But why did they come so soon?

"One word more. If you would have my mind at rest, don't worry yourself with remorse or regrets on my account. You have done me no wrong. What have you to reproach yourself with? That you gave me a soul? That you taught me the only thing that makes life worth living—love? Before that I was scarcely alive. You need never regret having made me so happy.

"And now, farewell, dear, dear, friend. I say farewell; but I remain with you and still yours. Farewell! Ah, me! it is soon said; but what a world of sorrow it contains!

BLANCHE."

Suzanne to Michael:

"What answer do you expect, Michael? You take a totally wrong view of life; and what you have written me is romantic folly, pure and simple.

"I believe what you tell me, and know you well enough to be aware what your duplicity must have cost you. But now that you have thrown off the mask, don't you think your present frankness is just a trifle cruel and egotistical?

"Do you not think that if you are so anxious to spare my feelings you would have done better to go on lying? or at least so softened the truth in your confession that it should not be so needlessly painful? One could almost fancy that you went out of your way to spare me nothing that could add to the bitterness of the deception you have subjected me to. You tell me that Blanche has never been yours. What do I care? I had rather a thousand times that she had been; for the situation would then be clearer, and I should know better where I was. Do you wish me to infer that you refrained out of consideration for me? I know better. It was for your own sake or for hers —probably hers. If she has not been yours it is because you love her too well to let her; for that reason, and that only.

"You think to touch me (for she has written in the same strain as you) by describing your so-called struggles against yourselves, your anguish, your remorse, and all the little inconveniences you have undergone. But you brought them on yourselves, and evidently you found some compensation somewhere. But have you ever given a thought to *my* sorrow? Do you suppose that *I* have had no suffering? And what have I done to deserve it? My only fault has been to love you too well, Michael. Yet you insinuate, delicately, that your feeling of love for me has vanished, and that only 'affection' remains. You seem to think that even that is allowing a good deal. 'Affection,' forsooth! But suppose that I still love *you?* Has that possibility ever struck you? Have you considered the pain your words might cause me if it were so? Have you, who ask me to be merciful to you, ever been merciful to me? or tried to spare me one pang of the many I have borne? No: your only feeling is gladness to be able to dispense with lies, and be, as you say, 'rid of a great burden,' scarcely caring that you have passed on the burden to *my* heart. Men are always selfish, and often brutal,—even the best of them. I always thought you one of the best, and think so still, in spite of everything. And yet——

"You have been quite frank with me, and you mean to be grateful—don't you? Well, you must not complain if I, in turn, am equally frank with you. It is just as well that I should be; for, as you say, now that I know all, I think we can turn our time to better account than in gushing over one another with a romantic sentimentality, which, howsoever well it may suit you, I am quite unable to share. I must, therefore, tell you that, allowing that I am resigned to retain only your affection (since you say you can feel nothing warmer), still, I cannot permit you to bestow your *love* elsewhere, howsoever convenient such an arrangement might be. I,—forsooth!—am to be content to go through the dry, commonplace, matter-of-fact business of life with nothing in it more emotional than ordering your dinner, sweeping up your hearth, and receiving your friends; while for her you are to keep all the romance and high-flown sentiment that you can still muster. And it has never struck you that I likewise want a little of the romance and high-flown sentiment as badly as you do. It is forbidden *me* to seek it elsewhere than from you; yet you ask me to look quietly on while you lavish on this girl all that you rob me of, and that I claim for myself. You dare to speak to me of 'feelings that influence one's whole life,' while you

have never troubled to ask yourself any of these questions, but have presumed to give me credit for a disinterestedness, a wholesale generosity, and a callous indifference quite foreign to me! You tell me that neither of you are saints. Then why am *I* to be? I do not set up to be any better than you, even though blameless towards you. I am a woman like another, and do not choose to be pushed aside.

"So, you see, you must make your choice. I told you so before, and I tell you so again now. It must be she or I. It cannot be both. I can be selfish, too; and in saying what I do I am thinking of myself, and myself only. I know you have no love for me to throw into the scale: so the odds are against me, and I shall probably lose. The whole future of our children will be affected by it; for the sins of the father are visited on girls almost as heavily as those of the mother. But I shall not allow such considerations to stand in my way. It shall be all your doing. I shall only have acted as any other woman would in my place. I am fighting for what is mine—for my rights—and though I may be robbed of them I will never, willingly, surrender them.

"I cannot help still cherishing the hope that you have enough worldly wisdom left to prevent you

giving me up. Such a step would mean the sacrifice, not only of your children, but probably of your whole social position. You see, I am trying to bring arguments to bear, quite irrespective of myself. It is a little humiliating to have to do so; but I feel bound to use every means at my disposal that may induce you to reflect, and save yourself, before it is too late. I know only too well that it will be no feeling for me, Michael, that will keep you; but I will bear my Cross. I sadly fear that 'affection' merely will be scarcely strong enough to hold you back, whatever you may wish me to believe. So it is only left me to appeal to your sense of duty. A man like you can at no time afford to be deaf to its calls, or forget the exigencies of his position, involving, as they do, the future of his children. I implore you to consider our little ones. Think of me taking them by the hand, and leading them from our home, and telling them, 'We are going away. Father does not want us any more.' Hesitate, if you will, and your heart permits you; but be as plain-spoken to yourself as you have been to me. Give up all paltering and sophistry, and those wretched attempts to make your conscience fit in with your wishes, or acknowledge, once for all, that your power for good is gone, as well as your sense of duty. Say, boldly, that

you mean to follow your passion wheresoever it leads you: to surrender yourself to its violence, and be reckless of its consequences.

"As you wrote to me, I have had to answer you, but I cannot hope this poor letter will alter your intentions in any particular. Yet—who knows? You are honest—too honest to be deaf to all reason and justice. I can think of nothing more to say. It remains for you to act. Our children are with me as I write. Annie has asked why you have not kissed her since yesterday. Have you not seen them since then?

"Think no more; but make up your mind. What good can thinking do? It seems to me all so simple! Good-bye!

SUZANNE."

Michael to Blanche:

"She will listen to nothing, dear. I enclose you her letter, for it is right you should know every detail of what has occurred. After exchanging letters we had a second interview. It was calmer than the first one; but she was just as peremptory. I had no idea she could be so firm, or rather, so obstinate. To everything that I said she answered, 'You have got to choose!' I could get nothing

more out of her. And I can see she is prepared to take the most extreme measures.

"'Choose'! What choice is there? I love you only; especially just now: you only, more than ever. How strongly, how passionately, I am drawn to you! how eagerly I would devote my whole life to you! But I am seized with feeling little short of panic when I think of the crash that would ensue from a rupture between my wife and me. You must not imagine, for an instant, Blanche, that I am allowing myself to be influenced by self-interest or ambition. No! But I cannot help foreseeing the downfall of an entire social scheme, and hearing the jeers of scorn that will pursue us, no matter where we may hide ourselves. Ah! if I were only a private person! But I am Teissier, the leader of the 'Social Regeneration' Party. I am not ashamed to confess I should quail before such a storm. Every conviction of my whole life would stand up in judgment against me; and I should sweep away, at a blow, all the little good I have ever been able to do.

"Nor is that all, Blanche! There are my children to consider, and my wife—yes: she too, though her cruelty to us has almost obliterated even my regard. If you remember, I have often told you that my love for you would not in any way

lessen my affection for her. Well, I was wrong. My affection for her is gone, and active dislike is taking its place. But it would be monstrously and iniquitously unjust that she should suffer undeservedly for, or by, us. And she *would* suffer—sorely—more than I ever thought for. I have probed her wound, and feel guilty and aghast at its depth.

"Of my children I will not speak. Your own heart will tell you all I might say, and more, for it is softer than mine.

"And then, I return to think of you,—you whom I love, and whose love I possess. But if they and she are not to bear the brunt, are you alone to do it? It would be too unjust, too cruel! I feel now how wrong and mean I have been to appeal to your love. Why was I not brave enough to keep silence while it was yet time? *You* may forgive me; but I cannot forgive myself!

"You see from all this how wretchedly undecided I am. I go to and fro, now inclining in this direction, now in that; the fact being that I am powerless to take either. Nor can I ask you to decide for me. It would be another act of cowardice, and all the more because I know beforehand the course you would recommend; the loftiness of your character leaves me no doubt.

"And through it all I must come and go, live, and talk, and act. I have got to speak with as clear a head as I may in the Chambers this evening, with a vulture gnawing my heart. Blanche, my darling, I would fain find the tenderest of tender words, as well as the saddest of sad ones, to tell you the sore trouble I am in. If I could only shut myself up for a time alone, and think, and think, I might, perhaps, hit upon some way out. But Life calls me, and prevents me thinking, as it prevents me surrendering myself to you.

"Still, you have only to say the word, and I will give up all and go. We would flee far away, where we are known to none; to a distant world and forget everything in each other's arms. I plead, now, for my heart's sake. Will you go, Blanche?

"But no! no! It is not possible! And yet it might be if you wished it, and had the courage —or I had. Why should we not? We could face anything together!

"But you say well, we should not be happy— we could not get away from ourselves.

"If only I could bear the whole burden for you! It is I who have been weak and wicked, and it is you and she who suffer. That maddens me to

think of more than anything; and my heart sinks within me from the misery I have caused.

"Blanche, *must* I say farewell? Give me time—do give me time—to think it over! Something can be done, and we will do it. Why should we let our lives be ruthlessly crushed, and our happiness destroyed? I *must* see you again, dear: it is not good-bye.

MICHAEL."

Blanche to Michael:

"How blind we have been, Michael! Now I can see plainly the course that we ought have taken from the first. The very *fact* of our love is sinful. We were guilty from the first moment it moved our hearts, and that we did nothing to stop it. It was then that we ought to have crushed it. But we were weak, and allowed ourselves to be led astray by our own sophistry. Now we are paying for it, and it is but fair that we should.

"You are too hard on your wife, dear friend. You must never lose sight of the fact that she is the injured party, and if she does not extend her forgiveness all at once you have no right to be angry. Remember all you have shattered around her; remember that confidence once destroyed is

slow to grow again; remember that it will need much patience, much humility, and many sacrifices, to win back her heart.

"I have nothing to complain of. Unlawful love carries its own punishment, and those who accept it have only themselves to thank. The time for pitying each other is gone: we must look at things as they are, and repair as best we can the evil we have wrought. We listened to our hearts at the expense of our consciences. We were wrong. The heart is an unsafe counsellor, and our conscience is taking its revenge.

"I have read Suzanne's letter. She has more good sense than either of us. In her place I should have said the same, or almost the same, as she has. It is quite true: life is not romance. Alas! far from it! It is we who foolishly won't accept it, but insist on trying to make it other than it is. Were we to state our case to a third party, he would scarcely know what we were after. He would only laugh at us, and I am not sure but he would be right. Ask yourself what you would think of a man in your place, a serious man, one of the best of your own colleagues for instance, if you heard him talk of sacrificing everything for a little love affair that could never lead to anything? You would put him down as a fool; and, if you had

any influence with him, you would exert it, and point out his duty to him. Go back to your fireside, Michael, and think no more of me. My future is simple enough. Why should I not marry? In what am I so superior to others that I should not lead my life just as they do? If we live in the world, we must follow its laws and customs. We must try and avoid, as it does, all exaggeration and excess.

"If I only had a mother's love, to guide and guard me! I could have gone to her, and told her everything, and she would have stood between me and myself. Alas! I had only you! My nature hungered for sympathy of any sort: so I clutched at love when it crossed my path, for I yearned to taste the cup of life. Had I been happy, you would never have loved me, I know, or at least, you would never have dared to tell me.

"But, first of all, I want to feel sure about you, Michael; and to be able to hope that your life will gradually settle down again. Remember that your true and faithful wife has promised to stand by you in evil, as in good, report. Surely she will not give you up for your first fault? How can she forget, in a moment, all the years of happiness you have given her? Ah! were I she, I should not require much begging! I should win you back by indulgent tenderness.

"I am leaving almost immediately for Lyons. I shall make a long stay there—as long, in fact, as the circumstances of the case may require. In years to come, when our love is an old story, perhaps I shall marry. It cannot matter much what I do, since I cannot be yours. But I shall always, always love you.

BLANCHE.

"P.S.—Please do not write to me again. I should not answer you. Everything is at an end between us—everything. This must be good-bye, once and for ever!"

Michael to Mondet

(Written three days after the preceding ones):

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—

"I am writing to you now that the storm has burst, from the midst of the ruins of all that made my life pleasant—I had almost said happy.

"You were right. Suzanne knew all, from the very day of your visit. She controlled her agony of mind, and kept it to herself as long as she could. It must have been sore suffering to her, for she is naturally outspoken, and her heart must have been bowed down under its burden. But the time came at last, when she could no longer control

the poignancy and violence of her feelings; and she broke down—for no special reason—about a mere nothing.

"We have had an explanatory interview; but it came so suddenly and unexpectedly that we both lost our self-possession; and everything that we said to each other—she in attack, and I in self-defence,—only aggravated matters. It was quite melodramatic. Everything I could say fell perfectly flat. She scarcely listened. She only kept on repeating that she would leave the house if I did not promise to break entirely with Blanche. She even wanted to force me to decide then and there. There was nothing for it but to rush away, and put an end to an interview that was only making things worse. I was fool enough to hope that, when she knew the real nature of my and Blanche's relations and feelings, her anger would cool down, and give play to her usual generosity. So I wrote to her, and made a frank and full confession of all that had occurred between us, and all that had passed through my own mind. Blanche, by my advice, also wrote to her. It was perfectly useless! Nothing we said moved her one inch. Poor Blanche, with the good sense which is united in her with such rare sensitiveness, instantly grasped the situation. Without

a moment's hesitation, she offered to go away, never to see me again, and to disappear out of my life. Do you not think that such a generous offer deserved a generous answer? But no: everything we wrote to Suzanne only seemed to increase her exasperation. Our offers and protestations only wounded her, and her self-love, the more. I fear that her vanity will stand in her way more than anything: I could detect the ring of it plainly, through whatever she said. A really sore heart is seldom angry; but wounded vanity soon shows its teeth and temper. Probably the best women even are like that. Their self-love outweighs everything else.

"I must confess that, when I looked forward to what has actually occurred, I never anticipated things taking such a turn. I fancied Suzanne would be more sorry than angry, and that she would be as ever kind and intelligent, ready to lavish on me the fund of sweetness and indulgence that she always has for others. But nothing of the sort! She has turned on me, angry, masterful, and obstinate, refusing to listen to reason, or to consider any proposal I make. What can I do? She has all the power and right on her side, and declines to abate one jot of either her rights or her power. She maintains an attitude of

outraged virtue with an unbending hardness of which I did not think her capable.

"After this useless interchange of letters, we had another interview. And a most curious one it was. All violence had departed. We were both absolutely calm, and talked as deliberately as if we were discussing some question of secondary importance. Each advanced his arguments. On my part, I said that a total rupture with Blanche was impossible, because it would be cowardly; that it would be noticed by all our friends, and that to insist on it would be an irreparable mistake. I tried to show her that it lay with her to play the magnanimous; for we were in her power, and knew it. I offered to concede something to her wishes: to see Blanche seldom, or not at all,—only to write to her.

"'By asking your leave,' I said, 'to do what I might easily do without it, I must surely convince you of my submission and good faith?'

"She replied with a forced, and irritating, calmness, that she 'must have all or nothing; that we had injured her, and that she demanded reparation; that she had undergone too much herself to have any pity left for *our* woes, which were richly deserved; that she should not consider either us or the world, but herself and herself only; that

my concessions were, probably unconsciously, insincere, and that she did not wish to hear anything more about them.'

"'So long as there is any tie between you,' she reiterated, 'you will continue to love her. And what guarantee have I that you will keep your word? You have lied to me for a whole year, and you would do so again. I wish to believe you; but I can't.'

"We talked in this tone for some time, she gaining ground, and I losing it; when, all of a sudden, she broke down, and, bursting into tears, exclaimed—

"'Ah! I can see you love her best, and I shall get the worst of it.'

"It looked almost like a got-up scene—those tears coming so exactly in time to finish me off, and carry my remaining defences by assault. I could not bear to see her crying. I gave in, angry with myself and her, and with a feeling of utter hopelessness.

"'No,' I said: 'you will not get the worst of it for you are not magnanimous enough. As usual, it is the best that will go to the wall!

"It was foolish for me to wish to wound her feelings; and the moment I had said it I was sorry for the cruel words. But I could not resist

making her atone a little for the sacrifice she was extorting from me.

"So, now, all is over. I am getting calmer, outwardly, at all events; but deep down in my heart——

"Blanche left yesterday for Lyons, as she said she would. She went without saying 'Good-bye,' in order, no doubt, to let me see that her decision is final, and that she leaves all past memories, and hope, behind. Poor darling! What her sufferings will be I alone know; for I alone have fathomed the depth of her nature and its tender yearning for love.

"You don't know how goaded I am by the thought of the ill turn I have done her! I have ruined her life, and sown in her poor heart the seeds of such suffering as no future happiness, if it ever comes, can extirpate. And I am able to do nothing whatever for her. I see no way of expiating my crime. I cannot even write her a word of comfort, or tell her that my grief is like unto hers, and that I do not forget. My love has been increased tenfold by the greatness of soul that she has shown. Up to now, I only loved her; now I worship her. She has shown herself one of those exceptional beings that stand out against the dark background of ordinary human

nature; a rare combination of all that is best, and noblest, and tenderest.

"And what is going, now, to become of Suzanne and me? What, will be our home-life henceforth, with this dark cloud over us, a cloud of rancour and ill-feeling, that nothing can remove? I now know my wife through and through. It will take years for her to forgive, if she ever does. And I, too, owe her a bitter grudge. She only exercised her right, it is true; but she need not have done it to the point of cruelty. As a matter of fact, it would have been wiser to be more generous, for I refuse to be driven. Yes: I am angry with her. I have looked into her heart, and it is neither as good nor as pure as I once thought it. We are now two partners that no longer pull together, who, mutually distrusting and disliking each other, are on the watch to catch each other out, and are only kept together by a community of interest and duty. For the last three days we have avoided each other; and we only exchanged a few words occasionally, on indifferent subjects. We each go our own way. When I come home she receives me like a stranger that has to be put up with because he can't be turned away from the door. My children's manner, too, is altered. The poor little things appear to feel that something is

wrong, and take their mother's part. Every spark of affection round me seems to have died out.

"You can now understand how wretched I am. It's my own fault I know; but that makes it all the worse. Am I so very wicked, after all? How could I have struggled against a passion that got hold of me before I was aware? We can be no stronger than the hearts within us. All that I could do was to keep it in check—no easy matter. I am not bad, nor wilfully perverse. But I have a great unsatisfied longing and craving for love. It is useless to argue about it, and seek for reasons and excuses. Granted that I am a wretch and a criminal. Well, I don't suffer any the less for that, and my pain is always with me.

"Write to me, dear friend, I beg of you; you are the only person to whom I can open my heart.

"In any case, you may expect us shortly at Annecy. I will take a holiday this year rather earlier, even, than usual.

"Work has become impossible to me, and you can scarcely imagine what a weary load my usual pursuits and business and public life have become to me. I should like to hide away in a hole, like a wounded animal, and brood over my grief.

Ever thine,

MICHAEL TEISSIER."

V.

Universal surprise arose when it became known that Teissier had asked for leave of absence, and was going to take holiday, more than a month before the end of the Session. Everyone had, of course, noticed for some time how ill and depressed he looked, and the marked alteration in his manner and appearance seemed to show that unremitting work was telling on him. His friends became uneasy, and hardly ever mentioned his name without some such remarks as "Over-work is killing him," "He has overtaxed his strength," "He is tired out." But they were so accustomed to seeing their pilot at his post, it never occurred to them that he might retire; and they contented themselves with marvelling at the energy with which he was using himself up. Indeed, for the fortnight following the domestic crisis that had left him with every nerve quivering, Teissier acted and spoke as if he had not a care on his mind. He even achieved some of his greatest oratorical successes. The motion brought forward by Monseigneur Russel for the reform of religious instruction happened to be just then under discussion, and had aroused a good deal of opposition. The Party of "Moral Regeneration" had never before shown itself so vigorous in attack.

The Jacobin faction had never been more alive to the danger of their position; they never stuck together so closely to keep the power which they felt slipping from their grasp. Michael led the assault. The two speeches which he made on the occasion are not yet forgotten; neither is the public enthusiasm that he aroused.

The Jacobins carried their point, but so narrowly that their victory was equivalent to a defeat. It almost called for a Dissolution, advisability of which was discussed at the Cabinet Council. But, foreseeing that such a course would insure the triumph of the Republican Right, the Government decided to continue to hold on as long as it commanded a bare majority. Parliament had still a year and a half to run, and in eighteen months the political weathercock might veer over and over again.

Such was the position of affairs when Teissier announced his departure. His political friends naturally did all they could to keep him. De Thornes, who, in his absence, would have assumed the leadership, knew the limit of his own powers, and how necessary Michael's presence was to check his own clever and practical, but hopelessly flat and commonplace, views.

"My ideas are too small," he said frankly of him-

self. "They are useful sometimes; but Teissier's broad grasp of things is indispensable to us."

He told this to Teissier himself with the shrewd straightforwardness that often acquires credit for higher qualities.

"We can't get on without you," he repeated several times. "We must carry on the attack. Your motion about insurance for the working classes, of which they cannot deny the urgency, gives us, if possible, a better standpoint than the one on the Reform of Religious Education. We might possibly upset the Ministry before the holidays. A Dissolution then would be imperative, and our triumph assured. But you must know we can do nothing without you. If you leave us, the indifferent voters will go all to pieces, and the neutrals will, as usual, vote for the men in power. Tremendous interests are at stake. Come! pull yourself together!—one more effort will do it."

"I can't," said Michael. "I'm done for—worn out—ill—something is wrong with me."

"But, remember, we shall never have such a chance again. Do try and summon up energy."

"I have none, I tell you. I must really rest. I have lost all power of thinking. If our Party were breaking to pieces, and one word from me would save it, I could not say it. When I get back

to my old home again, among my native hills, I may perhaps be better. But—do you know?—there's a stage in illness where one can think of nothing but oneself.'

And all that De Thornes could get out of him was a promise to come back to vote in case of necessity.

"But you must not send for me unless my presence is absolutely indispensable,' said Teissier, when making this concession.

And so he left with his family, taking along with him a gaping wound, a heart without hope, and a head throbbing with one ever-present thought: glad, if he could feel glad of anything, to escape from the demands of public business, from society and noise, and plunge into welcome solitude, where one can yield to sorrow in peace, without the added pain of trying to hide it.

Their little villa was a very modest one, at about twenty minutes, by road, from Annecy. The Virginian creeper threw itself over the walls, framed in the windows, and climbed the roof. A paddock, dotted with clumps of trees, sloped down to the lake. In a small creek a light canoe stirred at the least ripple of the dancing water. The last time the Teissiers came, they had occupied the same cottage. In those days Michael and Suzanne went

about merrily, arm-in-arm, expanding like flowers under the delight of rest and fresh air, and enjoying their holiday like light-hearted schoolchildren. Annie and Laurel would trot along on their unsteady little legs, and babble in the pretty language that children give up at five, followed by their nurse or by Blanche Estève. Blanche had come with them, to revive her strength after some youthful malady. She was sixteen then, and had large limpid eyes, pure as a cloudless sky. She was hardly pretty as yet, and they treated her like an elder daughter. Good Heavens! Who would ever have thought——? They took charming walks together, and Suzanne was delighted when, after a good stretch, she could see the colour coming back to the girl's cheeks. If they went into the town the folks would touch their hats respectfully, and, turning to look after them, would say to each other,

"There goes our Member, with his wife. They are the right sort, *they* are—and what a happy couple!"

Suzanne used to be pleased with her share of the attention. But what a contrast, now! The little house looked as if uninhabited, it was so silent, with the shadow of sorrow hanging over it, despite the golden sunshine out of doors. The Teissiers no

longer went out walking together. They were seldom seen together in the town, which they instinctively avoided, or only passed through quickly, as if not wishing to be seen. Suzanne, sad and pale, wandered about the little garden, which had nothing to brighten it now but an occasional game of play between Annie and Laurel. Michael usually left home at early dawn, and set off walking, for walking's sake, hoping to soothe his nerves by fatigue, and find comfort of a sort by coming back tired out, with a brain vacant of everything but the dull thud of a ceaseless regret. Sometimes Mondet went with him, when he was free. Our friend was getting a little stout and heavy; he puffed as he walked, and complained of the sun; and it really required all his friendship to drag himself up the hills, and tramp along the rough roads. The two friends would start together: Mondet with a thick crutch-stick, Teissier empty-handed, his arms swinging, or behind his back. They would start slowly, with no special object in view, talking or not, as it happens among old friends. They soon got into the depths of the country, so full of gentle life and golden quiet; with the reapers working in the sunshine, among the yellow corn: or else into the woods, where the birds darted backwards and forwards across the

shadows, and the dragon-flies hovered in the little chinks of sunlight that filtered through the leaves. The subject of their talk never varied. Shortly after they started Mondet always began, knowing that Michael was waiting for him to do so.

"Well, and how are you getting on?"

The reply would be that of a man sick of some chronic disease that absorbed his whole thoughts, and made him hypochondriacal.

"The same as ever."

And after a short silence, Teissier would say:

"Yes: time passes; but the wound does not close."

Mondet would say nothing, so as to leave him free to talk, and then he would continue:

"Sometimes I long to get back to work, so as to be forced to think of something else. I'm not of the contemplative sort, and soon tire of feeding on myself. At other times I shrink from my fellow-men, and business, and talk, and worry, and work. They have ceased to interest me."

Then Mondet would scold him, gently, as one would a little child that had done wrong, and has to be coaxed to be good.

"See here, Michael: it's no good giving in like that. You must try and fight your best against it! A man in your position, a great man, who might be in the Ministry as soon as he liked,"—

"Perhaps even sooner," interrupted Michael with a sad smile. "I never was ambitious, and I am less so than ever. Can't you understand how worthless it all seems to me, if I can't have the one thing, the only thing, I really want?"

Mondet still pressed his point.

"And what is to come of all the good you have done, and all you might still do? If you allow yourself to be carried away by the current, as you are doing, you will lose all energy."

"The good?" exclaimed Michael, with an incredulous shrug, and stopping in the middle of the road. "What good?"

"Are you, too, going to fall a prey to scepticism? Ah! woman, woman! Even the best of them is mischievous!"

"Good!" Teissier went on without noticing the outburst. "My dear fellow, I very much doubt——"

And then he went on to touch, briefly, on the various failures and disappointments of his recent public career.

"For upwards of six years I have been devoting myself to the rehabilitation of social morality and conservative principles. But, now that I, personally, have fallen a victim to them, I have awakened to the falseness, the cruelty, and the

inconsiderateness, of the social machinery which I have elected to champion. I now understand but too well why it is attacked by those who are suffering from it, and their reasons for wishing it altered, or even destroyed. When I undertook to uphold social law and order, I did not foresee at what an expense of self-denial and personal suffering it would have to be done. And what for, after all? Why fight against human nature? Why refuse it its rights? It always ends by our getting the worst of it."

It was Mondet's turn now.

"Take care," he said, "a very little further and——"

"I should overstep the bounds of morality and religion, you are going to say. Well, you are right. I sometimes think I have done so already. Not quite, however; and I try my best to keep within them. The flesh is weak; but I look for help to that higher Power who is always over us,—"

"At some little distance," said Mondet, dryly He never had had very serious convictions on religious subjects.

"I feel as if He were nearer since my trouble, my friend. You will say it is weak, perhaps. But what does it matter, if weakness gives me strength? Yes: God, the Church, and Religion, which I

have hitherto regarded simply as social machines, useful for the maintenance of discipline, I now find to have another, and a better reason for their existence. You see, I must get encouragement from somewhere."

Mondet did not answer. Talk of that sort irritated his nerves; but he was loth to contradict Michael, and add to his trouble. "Controversy would be out of place just now," he told himself; and kept his argument for another time. The two friends walked on, silently, side by side, stopping to admire a view, lunching frugally at some little inn, and then slowly retracing their steps towards home, the conversation still revolving round the same subject. Mondet's patience was inexhaustible, except when Teissier, in threshing it all out over and over again, would speak slightingly of Suzanne, and give expression to his soreness against her. At such times Mondet would stand up for her with outspoken common sense, and made Teissier angrier than ever.

"I thought she was generous, and find her only cruel."

"Would you have liked her to give you up to the other woman, and say 'thank you'?"

"No: I only wanted her to show some sympathy and pity. Blanche wrote her an admirable letter,

which she never even answered. She is governed by nothing but selfishness and vanity."

"You mustn't say that! You wrong her. You know very well that ——"

"I thought I knew, but I was wrong. A storm brings the mud to the surface; and in crises like this one can see the stuff people are made of. It is sheer selfishness and vanity, I tell you, with a touch of stupidity thrown in. She ought to have known that I should never forgive her for exacting such a wholesale surrender. If she had allowed me to write, just at first, I should have been grateful, and had some peace of mind."

"You need it badly, my dear fellow! I never heard such nonsense talked! You seem hardly to know right from wrong. When you come to your senses again you will wonder how you could have thought such things, much less said them. Luckily, you do it only to me, and I will forget it."

On another occasion, when they were discussing the same subject, Teissier all at once exclaimed, as if seized by a sudden inspiration,—

"Happy thought, Mondet! What do you say to writing to Blanche yourself?"

"I?" said Mondet. "Good gracious! What should *I* write to her about?"

"You can write to her perfectly well," began

Michael in a deprecating tone. "What would there be strange in it? You were her father's oldest friend.——"

"Except you."

Teissier pretended not to notice the innuendo.

"You could tell her how often we talk of her when together—and she would answer—and I should get to hear of her."

"And so, also, she would get to know that you have not forgotten her. No, no, my friend: you ask too much. I will not help you to do what I strongly disapprove of. If we once began that game we should never know where to stop; and through me it would be begun all over again. Besides, I take your wife's part, and know how really good and noble she is, whatever you may say; and that her love for you is far better worth than the other's. I never will do her an ill turn—firstly, for her own sake, and, secondly, for yours."

Michael knew his friend too well to return to the charge. But his one idea, fostered as it was by idleness, dulness, and solitary walks, finally mastered him; and he ended by taking up his pen, and breaking his promise.

"I cannot go on not hearing of you, Blanche," he wrote. "I *must* know where you are, and what you are doing, and thinking. So, ashamed as I am to

break my word, I should be still more ashamed to keep it any longer."

He thought he could go on writing out of the fulness of his heart, and put on paper all the love and anguish that was in him. But language plays us funny tricks sometimes, and the words would not come. However, he went labouring on.

"If you but knew how long and sad the days seem—the endless summer days! Their bright, sunny hours are a mockery of our grief! Happiness, and peace, and joy are gone; and this place, that I used to love, and where every step reminds me of the past, is nothing, now, but a weary, monotonous, prison-house. The thought of you has obliterated everything else, and I wander about in lonely quest of it. I know I shall not find it. Do you remember the time we spent here, together, four years ago? I did not love you then. You were at the parting of the ways between childhood and girlhood, and beginning to be so sweet, already! I am not quite sure but that I loved you even then. When I recall you, now, in this very house, where you used to romp with Annie, I can hear the ring of your laugh, and the echo of your voice. I remember one day, in particular, when we went to see the church together. You were in a serious mood, and made me tell you the whole story of St.

Francis of Sales. You were so much interested that, when we came out, I went to the bookseller's and bought you his *Life*, by Father Marsollier."

Michael pulled up to think over the episode to which he alluded. He could recall, with curious distinctness, the delicacy of Blanche's profile, her straw hat, and her little muslin gown, as she stopped in the street to peep into her new book. It was, probably, the first time he had ever noticed her charm.

"How many other things have happened since then to wipe out the memory of those days! Yet they now take hold of me, and wrap me round, and bear me off to you. Oh! for those sweet hours once more, when you bestowed on me the caresses of your love, the balm of your tenderness, and the confidences of your soul! You were my Light, and I unfolded myself to you. Now, alas! we are torn apart by the cruelty of things, and a great gulf is fixed between us by Fate, and our own act."

Here he stopped once more, utterly cast down. "Where is the good of writing her all this?" he murmured to himself; and remained looking at his half-written letter, hesitating whether to go on or not. Only the vaguest thoughts floated through his aching brain. Then, mechanically, he took up his pen again, and went on.

"But in spite of our separation, Blanche, I am still yours. I wanted to write that I might tell you so. I could not bear you to think I had forgotten you. Alas! we are not of the forgetting sort! I know your heart is as faithful to me as mine to you,—I am certain of it—and yet—sometimes I doubt—and then the thought crosses my mind that it would, perhaps, be better——"

He felt he was not saying what he meant. The words were cold, and conveyed no idea of the storm raging within him. What hindered him? Whence came the difficulty of expressing himself as fluently as he had thought to do? Despairing of success, he was on the point of tearing up his letter. But he hesitated, and then went on to the end.

"Won't you write to me? Just one word, to say that you are not utterly unhappy, but that there is comfort for you, as for me, in the thought that no distance can separate us; and that our unhappy love is stronger than everything, and as wide as space. Write to me to Mondet's. He will give me your letter. He's a good friend, and knows and understands. How impatiently I shall look for the post! Good-bye, Blanche! I have not said what I wanted. I don't know how to. Forgive me. Words are only words, after all, but love is love."

Michael read it over discontentedly, and signed

his name in full, from an imprudent impulse of overmastering love. He addressed his letter to Lyons, where (he concluded) Blanche still was, and, after posting it himself, he went to tell Mondet what he had done, and the service he required of him. Mondet scolded him angrily, protesting,

"If I did right I should burn her letter when it comes, without telling you. I should only be doing my duty as a friend. But you are so wretchedly demoralized, I shan't have the moral courage."

Indeed, four days afterwards, he came, bearing a little letter. Michael's heart stopped as he opened it,—it was *so* light! Inside a sheet of white note-paper, slightly scented, there was only a lock of hair, tied with a blue ribbon, and these words:

"Do not write to me again."

"What is the meaning of it?" he asked Mondet, who was watching him, slyly, out of the corner of his eye.

"The meaning? Don't you see? The lock of hair is a bit of herself. It is a charming way of answering. Simple, but charming. A merely sentimental woman would never have thought of it!"

"But why does she not wish me to write to her?"

"Because she is a brave girl, with a deal more character than you, my fine fellow. She has given her word, and means to keep it. And she's right."

"But I think that if she still loved me——"

"Don't talk like that! I didn't see your letter; but I'm certain that, of the two, hers has the most in it. Great man though you be, you're a simpleton. You may be quite easy: if it's love you want, you have got it. You can't do better than to obey her. She is more sensible than I gave her credit for. It would not take much to make me forgive her for allowing herself to be loved."

After this episode, Michael got into such a nervous state that his wife could not help noticing it. He avoided Mondet, as though afraid he should guess his thoughts. Instead of starting off, early, for his long walks, he paced round and round his garden, making believe to prune the trees, and looking too listless even to try and escape from his own boredom. Truth to say, Blanche's letter was never out of his thoughts. She had answered none of his questions, and his imagination had full play. The only fact he could arrive at he got from the envelope, which bore the Cobourg postmark. This puzzled him anew. Why had she left her

friends at Lyons? Why had she decided on rejoining her mother and her step-father at a place that she disliked so much?

Michael wore himself out seeking an intricate answer to these simple questions. He got into a state of restless irritability when he perceived that Suzanne was watching him with an uneasiness that he mistook for distrust. Twice over she asked him if anything was the matter with him, and he always answered,

"Nothing."

The brutally short answer was so palpably untrue, and showed such a wish to deceive and a determination not to be questioned, as only served to arouse dormant ill-feeling Nothing more passed; but the wife's face said,

"You are lying!"

And the husband's answered,

"So I may be; but that's my business, and not yours!"

When Suzanne, contrary to her usual habit, brought the letters twice running, to Michael, he broke out.

"You distrust me," he exclaimed; "and you are wrong. Take my letters and read them, if you like—unless, indeed, you have already done so! See, they are nothing but business letters—I never

get anything else now. You chose it should be so, and what more do you want?"

Suzanne burst into tears. With his peculiar quick sensitiveness, he was touched.

"Ah! forgive me!" he said. "I am a brute! Poor child! to think that we should have come to this!"

He made a movement to draw her to him, but she pushed him away.

"No, no," she said: "it's no use! I know too well that I am nothing to you, now."

There was no anger in her voice: only ineffable sadness. It touched Michael to the quick. But what answer could he give? Alas! it was but too true. But he inwardly resolved to be more loving to her. It was in vain. She repulsed his advances with a cold dignity, assumed at first, but gradually becoming natural to her. He then tried to approach his children; and for several consecutive days he was to be seen walking out with his little girls, who were pleased and surprised at being noticed by him. But Laurel was noisy, and tired him; and if he went out with Annie alone, Laurel was jealous: so he gave it up.

"He does not even care for his children now," thought Suzanne to herself.

"How cruelly unjust it all is!" said Michael to

Mondet, as he told him these details of family life. "I am not bad: I have done nothing wrong. I have made sacrifices that few would have made. Yet I am miserable, and all those I love are miserable on account of me. If I had acted like other men, and only been sufficiently vicious, and hypocritical, no one would have been a penny the worse, and I should be happy and envied."

"You are right," answered Mondet. "It *is* horribly unfair; but so it is. In fact, you are suffering because you are superior to the average human being. Others in your place would have done worse, and been better off. But they would themselves be worthless. That your unhappiness is the measure of your worth ought to console you somewhat. If you throw a handful of corn into a cage full of sparrows, they pounce down on it at once. But throw some into that of a delicate singing bird, a nightingale's or a linnet's —it looks at it, and wants it, but takes its time before touching it."

"They *do* take it, however, at last."

"Yes: because it's food, and they are only poor little birds. But what struggles a good man has with himself before he succumbs to temptation, howsoever attractive! And he is lucky, indeed, if he can suffer and be strong. He is, sometimes."

But not so Teissier. Without telling Mondet this time, he wrote again to Blanche. But no answer came, and he became more and more irritable and nervously excitable. The need to see her grew on him, and he cast about for some excuse for leaving Annecy. The opportunity presented itself by chance.

He had already, more than once, received invitations to public dinners from civic bodies, and town-councils. One day came one from Lyons and, all of a sudden, he determined to accept it. He knew he would hear of her there. He gave out that he was leaving on a long political tour. When Suzanne inquired about his journeys, and he named Lyons among other places, her suspicion was aroused, and she stopped him.

"Why Lyons, of all places?"

He answered her sharply.

"Because it's a large town."

Adding, when he saw she was still unconvinced,

"You are afraid—are you not?—that I will meet a certain person there? Well, you may be easy in your mind; she has left."

"How do you know that?" exclaimed Suzanne.

He saw his mistake, and stammered out,

"I know it through Mondet: he heard from her —once."

Seeing by her face that she did not believe him, he became angry.

"In any case, I have no intention of accounting to you for all my movements. Business is business. I am invited to go to Lyons; and if it suits me to accept the invitation, and speak there, it concerns no one but me. After what I have done for you, I think you might, at least, give up suspecting me."

As soon as he could get away from the cordial and somewhat embarrassing attentions, of his supporters at Lyons, Teissier hastened to call on Blanche's friends, with no other object than to see someone who had seen her, and learn about her.

He was received by the lady of the house, a simple, unaffected young woman, who manifested no surprise at the proceeding.

"Has Blanche not written to you since she left?" was her only remark.

"No. She knows that we are not good correspondents, and would write on business only," explained Michael. "I thought to find her still here."

"She spent only a few weeks with us, and left, rather hurriedly, to join her parents at Cobourg. I don't know exactly why—perhaps she feared the heat.—"

The lady hesitated for a moment, and then went on again,

"She was out of spirits, as though she had something on her mind. But, notwithstanding our intimacy, she confided nothing to me. You know what she is—all feeling—and I fancy she has had some love affair."

"The question of her marriage was mooted last year; but it came to nothing.—"

"At all events, she keeps her secret well, and seems scarce to allow, even to herself, that she has one; but you could not help suspecting it. Nothing roused her. Everything she did seemed to be done more from politeness than because she took any interest in it. But do you know what struck me most of all? I had always thought her rather indifferent to religious matters, not troubling herself about them. Well, while here, she went to confession——"

"To confession!" exclaimed Michael, in astonishment.

"Yes," she went on, in her quiet way, without noticing his agitation. "I happen to know that she consulted the Abbé Goudal, one of our best priests: an earnest, active man. She saw him several times, and after each interview she was perceptibly sadder, and more reserved. I am very

fond of her, and was troubled and anxious to see her in such a state."

There was a short silence, and then the young woman added:

"I have heard two or three times from her from Cobourg, and her letters are written in much the same depressed and wretched spirits as she was in while here."

Michael dared not ask to see the letters, and took his leave in a worse frame of mind, if possible, than if he had had no tidings at all. He determined to hear more, at any cost.

His famous speech at Lyons is still remembered. It marked the zenith of his oratorical successes, and recalled, in its wealth of language and breadth of view, the great forensic triumphs of the Restoration.

With that ardour of conviction which carried his hearers with him, Teissier drew, in broad lines, a masterly picture of the third Republic. He described, first of all, the struggles of its early days, and the frustration of the reactionary attempt of the 16th of May, followed by the victory of what he called the "Jacobins" and the "Party of Action." In every branch, whether of literature, or of the arts, of philosophy or of politics, they soon

displayed that narrowness of view which confuses material facts with eternal verities, and denies everything that cannot be visibly demonstrated. The genius of the French nation was paralysed under the alternate sway of the vulgar materialism of the Hôtel de Ville and of the coarse realism, and depressing pessimism, of the fashionable novel. For a time, it looked as if the great, big-hearted nation was worn out, and, like starved soil, was running back to barren prairie. But a faint breath of life began suddenly to stir in her. Whence did it come? From the public conscience, no doubt: from the soul of the country, which had been asleep, and was awaking. A few good men gave the signal. It was taken up, at first, by the less practical intellects, those who yearn towards the ideal with less faith, or force, than desire. They had become incapable of action from their old habits of mind, having grown up under such sterile conditions as not to have the vigour requisite for the work before them. But, despite their impotence, they had the best intentions. They were laughed at; but, nothing daunted, continued to preach a faith they no longer held, and urged a course of action which, while commending itself to their intelligence, they were utterly unfit to carry out. It was a curious phenomenon—

showing what perennial springs were still flowing from the old and sacred soil which once had produced our Duguesclin, our Joan of Arc, and our Henry the 4th! Each halting word bore fruit a hundred-fold. The great heart of the nation heard them, and, admitting their truth, endowed them, at once, with the precision, the form, and the force that they lacked. The public conscience was aroused, and in its turn roused a yearning for something to believe in, to hope for in the dormant virtues, the generous impulses, that lay fallow. A young generation arose, ardent, courageous, and intelligent: intelligent enough, at any rate, to profit by the teachings of the past. A new spirit animated the people, and showed itself in a willingness to bury old quarrels. The divorce between France of the Crusades and France of the Revolution ceased to exist, and they joined hands to march onward. The Church, conscious that her lofty mission ought to lift her above Party strife, accepted the Republic. The Republic, liberated from the tyranny of a few minds, as narrow as they were godless, no longer repelled the Church; and their allied forces marched once more, side by side, as the "Illustrious Bishops" and the "Christian Kings" were wont in times of yore. The broken links of tradition were welded anew,

and the present and the past combined to insure the victories of the future. It only needed a final effort, one last push, to overthrow the rotten edifice of Jacobin Materialism.

After this historic sketch, the speaker pointed out what still remained to be done—reforms in the schools, where character, as well as intelligence, should be educated; reforms in the army, which, summoning to its barracks, as it did, every class among the citizens at an age when the nation's character is being formed, should be a school also, a school of civic virtues; reforms in morals, which had become corrupted by evil example in high quarters, and by literary licentiousness; and, finally, social reforms, to unite employers and employed, mechanics and tradesmen, in a common league of pity and fairness.

Loud bursts of applause greeted the speech. The enthusiasm was universal. The glamour of the Ideal had got hold of the audience, which, in its innate love of right, imagined it had already as good as attained the realization of its dreams.

"Ah! you're the right sort!" said Peyraud, the journalist, to Teissier. He had come to report for "*Order*," and, for once, was so much carried away that he forgot to make his usual objections. One of the chief magistrates of Lyons made himself the

organ of the general opinion, in a fair and moderate reply. "What France required," he said, "was to be got at through her heart. It was through her heart that Gambetta had won her over. The person who had just spoken was the heart of the new Party. Therefore, he was strong, and gained a hearing, as well as recruits."

After this reply, many well-known men came to touch glasses, and shake hands, with Michael. They told him their names; he bowed, and said a civil word or two. Suddenly, he started. He heard the name of Abbé Goudal, and saw before him the tall figure of a priest, whose piercing eyes looked him straight in the face. He winced under their keen glance; but he returned it, and dissembled his discomfiture.

"You have spoken grandly, sir," said the priest, in a slow, sonorous, and grave, voice. "You nobly defended a noble cause, for which one ought, willingly, to sacrifice everything."

He emphasized this last word so markedly that Michael fancied it was done on purpose. He tried to answer; but the words would not come, and suddenly, pressing the Abbé's hand, he turned away to someone else.

Meanwhile, the band struck up the "Hymn of the Girondins," and Teissier fell into a train of sad

reflection. If these people who admired him, and drank in his words, could but see his inner mind! If they only knew! If they could have detected, under his calm and composed exterior, the blind passion that was consuming his whole being! If they had only guessed what a superhuman effort it cost him to follow his own words, or listen to his own voice, as he spoke! But they didn't; they guessed nothing; and accepted him for what he seemed to be. They saw in him only Michael Teissier, the deputy. They knew nothing of the man, the real man, with his sorrows, and his fierce emotions Overpowered by the need to give relief to his feelings, Teissier turned to Peyraud, who was still standing behind him.

"All this is mere talk," he said. "There is something else—something more."

"What did you say?" asked the astonished journalist.

"Something else," repeated Teissier, in a low voice.

Peyraud gazed at him with his searching eyes. He guessed nothing, of course: how should he guess? But he detected that the thunderbolt had left its mark on the oak-tree, and later on understood the full meaning of the inopportune and mysterious words, wrung from a heart that, for the moment, had lost all self-control.

The speech at Lyons was followed up by a campaign, during which Teissier showed an insatiable restlessness, and sought to drown thought in talk, noise, and action.

From Lyons he went on to Dijon, and thence to Marseilles, where the popular demonstration threatened to become almost riotous. Then on to harangue the strikers at Fourmies. His popularity had grown during his two-months' silence. It waxed greater day by day, augmented by the efforts he was making both to act and to speak. His flow of words was irresistible, and the suppressed tempest within him imparted an infectious excitement to his very gestures. He exercised the intangible charm, peculiar to deep and reserved feeling, sometimes so noticeable in the conduct of life. Women were enthusiastic about him. The very newspapers that opposed his views most strongly respected him personally.

It was just about this time that a reporter, who was passing through Annecy, thought it a good opportunity to publish an article on Teissier as he appeared in his summer quarters. It was a perfect idyll. It described even to the cotton frocks worn by Annie and Laurel, and held forth on the peaceful domestic happiness which awaited

the great man, who was stumping the country for the good of his kind.

Michael saw the article at Cobourg. He read it in the course of an interminable morning of passionate waiting, and feverish anxiety. Having got there early, in lovely weather, he made sure that Blanche would come down to the seashore, either to bathe or to walk. Without having made up his mind whether he would speak to her, or content himself with seeing her go by, he waited, strolling along the endless promenade, at whose foot lapped, noiselessly, a sea as blue and pure and unfurrowed as heaven. As time crept on, the shore gradually became crowded, and the bathers splashed in sight of the gaping bystanders. Nervous anxiety brought beads of moisture to Michael's brow, and parched his throat, as he wandered through the crowd, trembling at each new group that passed, while carefully avoiding any familiar face that he saw in the distance. He did not always succeed, and was the subject of various polite and obsequious salutations, and enquiries as to "what brought him there?" while his very soul was going out towards Blanche, dreading lest she should pass by while he was in the clutches of one of these bores. But she came not. And he began to fancy, as he paced backwards and

forwards for the twentieth time, looking about him in vain, that his agitation could be read in his face, and that the cause would be guessed if Blanche, by chance, went by. Still, he could not give up the idea of seeing her after four maddening hours of waiting. Wild fancies floated through his throbbing head—visions of disease and death—and he gasped for breath. The crowd at last began melting away, as the luncheon hour approached. Michael went into a *café*, and, ordering two eggs, which he could scarcely swallow, decided on the course he would take. He had to leave by the night express, and could not face an afternoon of such, probably, fruitless agony as in the morning. So, though dreading to meet Blanche in the presence of others, he made up his mind to go and call at the De Quérieuxs' at all costs.

Mdme. De Quérieux—whose husband was away from home—received him in the verandah. She was, evidently, surprised to see him; and he was obliged to explain that, being in the neighbourhood of Cobourg, where he knew his ward was, he thought he would call and enquire for her.

"She is quite well," answered Mdme. De Quérieux, who, as a matter of fact, never noticed her daughter's looks. "She is enjoying herself a good deal, and the sea air suits her admirably. But, if you will

allow me, I will go and fetch her. She will be surprised and pleased to see you."

"She is quite well, and enjoying herself a good deal." Michael thought over the two statements when he was left alone. But when Blanche entered the room all his growing suspicions vanished. She had become very thin, and painfully pale. Her manner, her movements, her looks, her whole person, palpably betrayed a deep and settled sadness. Mdme. De Quérieux had only made an excuse of calling her to go and change her own dress. Blanche knew this, and did not hurry to come; but she found herself, unavoidably, for a few minutes alone with Michael.

"Blanche!" he exclaimed, as he took her hand. "Blanche! I could not help coming to see you."

He stood close to her, drinking her in with his eyes, and gazing enquiringly into her face. She drew her hand away by a gentle effort, and murmured, in a faint and trembling voice, as she sank into a chair,

"Ah! you are not acting generously!"

"Don't reproach me, I implore you!" he answered passionately. "I was *too* miserable. I could bear it no longer, Blanche. It was for the sole purpose of getting here I have been rushing, for the last fortnight, from town to town, under-

going dinners and speeches, and a Babel of noise and talk, of which I did not listen to a word!"

The girl gave him her hand; but when he made as though to raise it to his lips, and sit down by her, she again drew it away.

"No," she said, gently.

Then, after a short silence,

"Since everything keeps us asunder, why do you go on persecuting me? It is hard to forget you, and yet I must, I ought to,—we have been so weak! I used not to understand; but I do now!"

As she said this, her sad eyes looked away into space, as if seeking comfort from afar; and Michael remembered about the priest who had lately crossed her path.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, replying more to her thoughts than to her words, "we are surely unhappy enough to afford ourselves a little indulgence. Don't let us spoil these few moments that might be almost happy! Let me look into your eyes, and then I will go, if you bid me, never to return."

Without raising her eyes, she said in a low whisper, "I think it would be best to do so."

He was about to reply, when the entrance of Mdme. De Quérieux interrupted him. She was all graciousness, smiles, and cordiality, and invited

Michael to dinner. He was on the point of accepting, even at the risk of missing his public banquet, when he caught Blanche's serious look, saying "Go!" and he declined.

For one moment more he heard the buzz of Mdme. De Quérieux's voice extolling the pleasures of Cobourg; he even managed to add a few words of his own to the conversation. Then he said "Good-bye," and returned anew to pace up and down the sea-walk, until his train started. The sea smiled under the caresses of the setting sun. The paling sky, with a broad line of crimson clouds on the horizon, looked far, far, off. Ah! how heartless the impassiveness of Nature seems in our hours of agony.

Five or six days later, Michael received, by post the following letter from Blanche.—

"I was harsh to you the other day, Michael when you came on purpose to see me. And when you were gone, after our cold farewell, and I thought of your loneliness in the train that bore you from me, I reproached myself; and I cried all that night about it. I felt that you would think I had ceased to love you. And yet I am yours, yours wholly, despite separation and distance. I only meant to abide by our resolution, and all I have gained is to be compelled to write to you

now, for I cannot bear that you should doubt me, or be angry with me. You looked so miserable, my poor Michael. Am I indeed so much to you as that? I wish I could comfort you, and say something to soothe your pain. Alas! I cannot! Would that I could be once more the child that you used to call your 'eldest daughter'! Do you remember? You often had headaches then, and nobody took such care of you as I. So you used to say, at least; and Suzanne never thought, then, of being jealous of little Blanche in her short white frock, whose long hair you pretended to pull, gently. Now, everything is changed. I have no longer any right to love you. If you are ill, I may not nurse you. You looked so pale and tired, dear friend, I am sure you needed me! But it is forbidden me to hasten to your side, or even to see you. When you had made a long journey for my sake, I was obliged to repulse you; and I know I am doing wrong, very wrong, even to write to you!

"I have been thinking over many things since we parted. In the first days at Lyons I felt lonely, oh! so lonely! and in such sore need of someone to lean on, some voice to guide and comfort me! I *must* tell you about it, Michael! I turned my thoughts to Heaven, and prayed; but no answer

came. And then I cast myself on my knees at the confessional, and told everything to the priest—everything, except your name, of course, though he tried hard to get it out of me. But what was the use? He told me nothing that my own conscience has not often told me since I have loved you. He pointed out my sin, as if I did not see it, already! and his words only made me the more unhappy, for I knew they were useless, and that nothing, nobody, could prevent me loving you always. When I wept, and asked him what I was to do, he began to talk about going into a convent.

"A convent! No—never! Good Heavens! what a heart I should take there! Besides, I love life, and want to taste it; and feel I am near you, in spite of the impassable gulf that divides us. I want to keep myself entirely for you, and to surrender nothing of me, either to Heaven or to anyone.

"Still, when I heard you were coming to Annecy, I left Lyons—for fear of being too near you. Oh! how hard it was to go farther off! It cost me no small effort to come here, and live with those who are more to me than kin, and less than kind. My mother told you I was well and bright, and enjoying myself; and she believes it. She knows or cares so little for me! I have all the lonely

days to myself, to think of you in. Those round me do not hinder my mind running out to you, and calling you! They may drag me into their life, and think, because I don't resist, that it suffices and contents me. How little they know! Luckily, perhaps; for nothing would annoy me more than that they should suspect the truth.

"Often and often, Michael, I have thought of dying. But do not fear! I know you must not die with me, and I will not leave you alone. Little as I am with you, does not the knowledge that I am alive, somewhere, make you feel less alone? Surely you often feel my presence? I, sometimes, think I can hear the gentle rustle of your thoughts, and send back mine to you through space. In any case, you know that, if you become too unbearably unhappy, you can call, and I would come. I owe no duty nor gratitude to any but you, who have loved me.

"Good Heavens! How can I write such things to you? When I have posted this letter, I shall be both ashamed and sorry, and angry with myself for writing it. I will send it, however. If I did not, the idea that you doubted my love would go on tormenting me. You are so good, you will understand me. You will not be vexed with me for loving you, nor take advantage of it. We both

know that we must be stronger than our guilty and forbidden love.

"Good-bye, my beloved! I am yours, yours always!

BLANCHE."

After two or three more speeches, several more banquets, some visits to various public institutions, and taking part in one of those congresses that, during the summer vacation, fill the leisure time of our public men, for lack of anything more exciting, Teissier went back to Annecy for a few days, before returning to Paris with his family. Once on a time, when he came back from these tiring expeditions, still tingling from the fray, and the nervous excitement of action, Suzanne would soothe him gently, with tender words and caresses, and all the sweet ways that women lavish on those they love. But, now, she greeted him coldly, distrustfully, looking into his face to see if he was not hiding some fresh secret. Michael could not help wincing under her searching gaze. He said to himself, "She has guessed." And she thought to herself, "He is concealing something from me—he is lying lying as usual!" And they grew farther from one another than before, though, God knows, that

was far enough. Everything seemed to be in unison with their feelings. The Virginian creeper was beginning to take its red autumnal tints; the sky looked greyer; and the autumn crocuses dotted the fields. There was a something less joyous in Annie's play, and even in merry Laurel's laughter.

Michael, longing to escape from scenes which only conduced to sad thoughts, had recourse to his former long walks, to get away from himself, and from his "happy home," as the newspapers called it. Mondet accompanied him as often as he could.

"Well, my distinguished friend," he said, when they met after Teissier's return, "I hope you enjoyed yourself? You got through a lot of tall talking! If you only keep one quarter of your promises when you get into office, France will have nothing to envy Arcadia! You distributed your favours impartially all round, to the labourers, mechanics, employers, and soldiers. And yet you are not a humbug."

"I don't know what I said," answered Michael. "I was thinking of something else all the time. You thought, doubtless, that I left home for the purpose of going to Lyons, and Amiens, and Fourmies? But you are wrong. I had only

Cobourg in view all the time. Yes, Cobourg: where she is, and where I saw her"

"Ah! wretched man! you have no self-control!"

"I could hold out no longer—I love her more than ever. It can't go on. I am worn out!"

"Naturally. You have seen her now, and have got to begin all over again."

"It seems to me we are only, now, beginning," muttered Michael, in a low tone.

"Be quiet!" said Mondet, sharply. "I don't quite know what you mean, but I hope—nothing."

After a moment's silence, he added—

"I must speak quite frankly to you, Michael, for, though I really pity you, I can't help seeing that you are making yourself ridiculous, and I am sure that you would see it yourself, if you only considered a little. What? A man of your age, and character, and position, not to have the moral courage to conquer a passion worthy only of a love-sick boy? It is not permitted to a man, filling your position, to conduct himself as if he was eighteen!"

Michael smiled.

"My position?" he said. "What do I care for my position? My life, my whole life, is in question. And you think me ridiculous? Well, I don't. Do you know the value of such a love as mine? I

can think of nothing nobler or grander in the world. And, even if I could, I would not give it up. I am glad to have a heart to break for it I am proud of it: yes: proud. I think better of myself for being able to love madly, unreasoningly, foolishly, wrongfully, hopelessly, and in the teeth of everything! I like to think that I love as I do, in the midst of an ice-cold world, where men live for nothing but to gratify their ambition, and women their vanity. My love is the best, most unselfish, and most generous part of me. I hold it dear, and will keep it to the last gasp."

Mondet shook his head.

"You must be, mentally, a good deal out of gear, to muddle yourself with such paradoxes. What do you expect me to say to such stuff? You are too hopelessly wrong-headed to listen to reason; and, as you prefer to remain so, no words of mine would have any effect. There is only one chance for you; to get back to work, and plunge into the feverish Parliamentary strife. If you were the chief of the coming Cabinet——"

Michael interrupted him, shrugging his shoulders.

"Yes: no doubt I should come, and go, and work, and sit on commissions, and speechify, and so on—in a dream the whole time. But my real life would be led elsewhere. My heart is not in

what I do, or say, but in what I think, and feel. I have schooled myself to 'double' the part, and lead two separate lives: my outward one, that everyone sees, and thinks I am absorbed by; my inward one, of mental exaltation and chivalric devotion. Only *you* know that it exists. It is my true life. The other slips by me unnoticed and uncared for."

Mondet did not answer. He only made a gesture of dissent; and the two friends gradually disappeared, among the russet trees, into the melancholy autumn mist that rose from the lake.

It always pained Suzanne to see them go off together. "They will talk of Her," she thought; and she gazed for hours in loneliness and sadness at the lake, while Laurel worked in her garden and Annie came to lay her pretty head on her knees.

"What is the matter with you, mamma?"

"Nothing, my child, nothing."

Ah! How willingly she would have forgiven, if he had only come to her openly, and frankly! But no! He stayed with her because he had to, because he was tethered by a chain, like a wild beast. Each day was a fresh struggle with himself. She would almost have pitied him, but that each day drew her farther from him. More than

once, from a feeling, half pity, half weariness, she was on the point of saying, "Write to her, then: I allow you to, for I see you are dying to do it." But she couldn't: something inside her prevented her. Some indefinable, negative, force chilled them to one another, and made them shudder if, perchance, Michael absently laid his lips on his wife's brow.

When they left Annecy, though less angry, perhaps, they were far more estranged than on the first day of their quarrel.

PART III.

THE Chamber hardly met before the Government afforded the Opposition an excellent opportunity of attack. One of those unfortunate disasters which always excite deep popular feeling had just come to pass in Tonquin. In consequence of a local insurrection, a small detachment of a hundred men had been massacred; and a second detachment, sent against the rebels, who had, meantime, been considerably reinforced, was compelled to retire. The revolt, which in its incipient stage might have been easily quelled, was assuming alarming proportions, and the Ministry found itself constrained to ask for supplementary supplies. It so happened that at this very moment Diel, the Colonial Minister, was being made the subject of a double scandal, and seemed likely to be the hero, not only of a divorce suit, but of a green-room brawl as well, the details of which had found their

way into the "Society" paragraphs of the newspapers, and were being freely commented on. This "double event" happening, as it did, at the very time that the troops under the control of his department were being slaughtered, his position was one of extreme delicacy. An angry growl began to take the place of the singular indulgence thitherto shown to him by public opinion: it almost looked as if he must come to grief. It was rumoured that even his own side would not back him up, and that the Ministry would have to get rid of him. The Opposition was already counting on scoring a triumph, and making a breach in a Cabinet whose cohesion against the attacks of an increasingly-powerful Party had been the principle of its strength. A furious newspaper war was in full swing. The Press took sides energetically, not to say vehemently. Teissier's paper, '*Order*,' stood almost alone in its comparatively moderate tone. Michael had had a lively discussion on the subject with his Editor. Peyraud, who was a clever tactician, wanted, as he said, to "let fly."

"Morality, just now," he said, "commands the market. Let us profit by it, and smash the rascals who have laid themselves so open to attack!"

"Let us be consistent, first of all," answered

Michael. "We have often rebuked the organs of the Extreme Left for their unwarrantable attacks on their adversaries' private life. Don't let us take a leaf out of their book. Pitch has a way of sticking to those that meddle with it."

Peyraud gave in, though he was convinced they were making a mistake.

De Thornes, to whom he complained, shrugged his shoulders.

"Fellows like Diel can do anything," he said, with his usual cynical wisdom. "They always manage to scrape through somehow."

Diel, indeed, did not seem to care a penny for all the abuse showered upon him. On the Ministerial bench he displayed his usual placid impudence; no cloud on his brow, no trace of embarrassment in his manner. He showed himself in the Bois, riding his spirited Irish mare with his usual judgment; and at the theatre he was equally impassive, under the concentrated stare of every opera-glass in the house.

"He plays a plucky game!" said Peyraud. "What an exquisite pleasure it would be to bowl him out!"

When the question of Supply arose and stood first on the "Order of the day," Diel spoke with all the deliberation of a man sure of himself, and

of the clearness of his conscience. De Thornes replied incisively, but kept strictly to the point in question. A member of the Government then made a wearisome, long-winded speech, as if intending to tire out the House. A member of the Right then rose, and in a rather dull address touched, at last, on the personal question which was in everyone's mind. "And what was the Secretary for our Colonies doing, forsooth, while our savage enemies were slaughtering our soldiers?" Expectant murmurs ran round the Assembly and the spectators when Combel rose, and walked up to the tribune. It was evident that the Ministry meant to stand to their guns, and that open war was to be declared.

The President of the Council explained, first, the reasons "of general interest" which prevented the Cabinet from remaining passive during the debate, and then he went on:

"There are others, also, which make it incumbent upon me to say something in support of one of the most active and valuable of our colleagues since we have occupied this bench; and you will not be surprised, gentlemen, if I allude to this matter, since the Honourable Member who has just spoken has practically challenged me to do so. We can never allow gossip from outside to interfere with

the conduct of public affairs. We have always held that the interests of the State should be above, and beyond, such futile reports and calumnies."

At the word "calumnies" he was interrupted by general protests, and Teissier's voice was heard above the tumult:—

"I demand a hearing!"

The President's bell rang; and, as soon as order was sufficiently restored, Combel continued, but without completing his sentence. "We have seen elsewhere, statesmen useful, if not necessary, to their country, ruined by incidents that left their honour, as public men, intact. It was an unworthy spectacle, which, I hope, we shall never see here. True, gentlemen, we require that those who direct our public affairs should have clean hands; we are alive to what they owe to us as well as to themselves; but let us refrain from raising the veil from their private life. That concerns them, and them only, until such time as it is thrust on public notice in other ways than by worthless gossip. That time has not yet come."

The Chamber again showed signs of impatience, and the Right benches interrupted the speaker. Combel, as soon as he was allowed to go on, dropped the personal question, as if he had exhausted it,

and, returning to the question of Supply, looked at it from various sides.

He could scarcely gain a hearing. A storm was evidently brewing. Scepticism was out of date; and it was plain that if only some one, carrying the weight of real conviction, would honestly show up the disingenuousness of the light and airy tone assumed by the Colonial Minister, the crisis, which had hung fire so long, would be precipitated. Combel began to grow uneasy when he saw he had failed to get the ear of the House, and was steadily losing ground; and De Thornes whispered to Michael—

"It is for you now to go in and win. I am confident of it; and I'm not often wrong in such matters, as you know. What a victory we shall score! and how they will bite the dust!"

"I'm not very fond of battles of this sort. I disapprove the weapons I am obliged to use."

"You are quite safe, in any case, against their being turned against yourself. There are no weak spots in your armour."

Just then an usher handed Michael a visiting-card. He grew deadly pale, and rose immediately.

"What!" cried De Thornes. "You are not going out? Why, Combel is just going to finish."

"On thinking it over, I have decided not to speak."

"You can't be serious? Look here, Teissier: this is not a time to show weakness. You know that we all look to you."

"Perhaps so," said Michael; "but I couldn't conscientiously say what I am expected to. I should get the worst of it, my good friend; and I think it better to leave it alone."

As De Thornes was about to press the matter further, he repeated, significantly:

"Believe me, I had much better say nothing." And he went out, after sending a line, to say he was doing so, to the President of the Chamber.

As Teissier declined to speak, and no one else came forward to continue the debate, the vote, by ballot, was taken. Supplies were carried, by a majority of thirty. Under the circumstances, even this slender majority constituted a striking Ministerial success. It practically exonerated Diel, to whom every one now held out a hand. He took his triumph modestly and carelessly, and as if he had never had any doubts as to the result. When someone said to him, with awkward adulation,—

"We have shown, at all events, we are not like the English; and that, here, Mr. Parnell——"

He stopped him with a sentence that instantly spread like wild-fire.

"Yes: we always overlook such matters in France—at least, when they involve only habitual offenders in that line!"

Meantime, Teissier, overcome by blinding and breathless emotion, rushed out to meet the person who had asked for him. It was no other than Mdme. De Quérieux. Only one hypothesis could, he feared, justify such an unlooked-for visit. Mdme. De Quérieux doubtless knew all, and had come to overwhelm him with maternal reproaches. He trembled, like a child, at the bare idea of being subjected to the rebukes of this woman, for whom he had not the slightest respect. During the few minutes that he kept her waiting, he cast about him, in vain, for a line of defence. She was entitled to call him anything she pleased—wretch, or coward, or hypocrite. She would have right entirely on her side.

Ah! What strange scenes there are in the Comedy of Life, where nothing is seen in its true light, and no one wears his true face! She, a bad mother, steeped to the lips in worldliness, would play the part of protector of her neglected daughter against him; she, who had never cared for Blanche, against him, who adored her;

and, because he could not put on a smile, like Diel, and brazen it out, he would have to bow his head, confess his sin, and be condemned as a criminal.

Mdme. De Quérieux's greeting, however, reassured him.

"Good-morning, dear M. Teissier!" she began, holding out her hand. "It is an age since we have met. Are you beginning to forget your old friends?"

Michael's self-possession returned as he stammered out,—

"You know how busy I have been, dear lady, since the Chamber has been sitting."

"Yes, yes: I know; and I am not reproaching you. I hope Mdme. Teissier is quite well?"

"Quite well, I thank you."

"And the children?"

"And the children too."

"That's all right. You must know that, while you have been neglecting us, most important things have been happening."

Michael's heart stood still.

"Indeed?" he said.

"Yes," continued Mdme. De Quérieux: "most important things, about which I should like to have the benefit of your advice and good offices.

But you must tell me if I am in the way—won't you? Can you give me a few moments?"

"I am at your orders, madame."

"Good. Then I will tell you the whole matter in a few words. Blanche has had a proposal of marriage. You are aware that she has already refused several excellent offers. My husband and I have hitherto left her perfectly free to act as she chose; but, really, this time we can no longer remain passive as to her decision. She is now of an age when she ought in reason to settle down. Don't you agree with me?"

Michael forced himself to answer.

"Certainly."

"Well, her present admirer fulfils all the necessary requirements. He is no longer very young, which, as you know, is rather an advantage than otherwise. He has ample means. He was in the last Chamber of Deputies. By the way, I don't fancy he was quite one of your friends."

She stopped, and Michael said after her:

"One of my friends?"

"I mean, of course, one of your political friends. In short, it is M. Graval. You know him—don't you?"

"Yes, madame: I know him, slightly."

"I believe him to be a perfectly honourable man, though rather Radical in his opinions. He has no doubt opposed you sometimes in the Chamber. But that is not a reason why Blanche should not marry him. In any case, he has now withdrawn from politics, and is entirely taken up with historical researches. Therefore, M. De Quérieux and I hope that you will give us your support; and, as the marriage is most suitable in every way, you will consent to use your influence with our daughter in this matter."

As Michael did not answer, she added,—

"May we count on your help?"

He reflected a moment.

"M. Graval," he said, with an effort, and after a short pause, "does not hold opinions that I agree with. But I cannot see what that can matter to Mdlle. Blanche, and I know nothing but good of him."

He paused.

"Then we may look upon it as settled?" said Mdme. De Quérieux.

"Excuse me, madame," he replied. "I said I had never heard anything against M. Graval, and that is all in favour of a man who has been mixed up with politics. But then I know him very slightly; and, before taking any steps in the matter,

I should like to make some further enquiries about him. I should want a few days for this, please; at the end of which time I will write to you, as well as to Mdlle. Blanche."

"Write to her? Why won't you see her?"

"So I shall, madame, should the circumstances require it."

"Many thanks, dear sir. Again I must apologize for having intruded on you. I hope I have not made you miss some interesting speech."

With this she went away, but not without casting some inquisitive looks at the people standing and moving about. Teissier, meanwhile, returned to the Chamber and silently took his seat again. The House was stolidly getting through the ordinary routine of business. The seats were empty, and the droning voices of the speakers were drowned in the buzz of conversation.

De Thornes rose to go, and, holding out his hand to him,

"You have made a blunder," he said, reproachfully.

Michael looked at him, absently.

"What does it matter?" he murmured.

De Thornes turned his shrewd and piercing glance on him for a moment.

"We have grave interests in our charge," he said, "and we may neglect them once too often."

"Neglect them?" answered Michael, with a forced laugh. "Why, we think of nothing else!"

He added, drily,—

"Only, we are not quite of one mind on the subject sometimes: that's all!"

De Thornes went out without saying anything further, and Michael was left to himself. A storm of tumultuous feeling raged within him. Often since he had loved her, he had thought of Blanche's possible marriage, but always with the gentle resignation of a voluntary sacrifice. He had said to himself, "I will myself advise her to marry. I will tell her that she may once more be happy—in the years to come—when she has forgotten me; or, if not happiness, she will find, at all events, with some good man, calm and serenity, in a life of ordered duties, which, by slow degrees, will still the tempest of the heart. I will tell her that, since we are for ever separated by an impassable barrier, she must not sacrifice the sober facts of life to a dream. I will tell her that she has long years of life before her, in which to enjoy that affection which is almost as precious as love. I will tell her I love her, but will surrender her, and that our love must be sacrificed. All this, and more, will I say; and she will understand. She will let herself be carried passively down the

stream of Life; and, later, when she looks back to these sad times, she will cherish an unsullied memory of me. It may, perhaps, keep her heart proof against other troubles. If I cannot do anything to secure her happiness, at least I shall have found for it the best substitute I can."

Such were the vague projects he had fostered in his mind whenever the idea of Blanche's marriage occurred to him, during the time when they saw each other daily, and dwelt, as yet, in their fool's paradise. He smiled sadly and bitterly to himself as these fine promises and lofty intentions recurred to him. They were only faint memories now, generous chimeras that came straggling back to him, with broken and bedraggled wings, out of the dimness of the years. He only lived now in the thought that she was his—his still, in spite of separation—when lo! a cruel hand was laid on her to wrest her from him! The wrench was far worse than he had conceived possible. It was no light wound that would be cured by the healing balm of sacrifice; but a bleeding, burning, malignant, gaping sore. Blanche was to belong to another! and what other? Michael knew this fellow Graval; and, although he had asked for a few days' delay, it was not that he might make enquiries about

him, but in order to collect his own thoughts, and gain breathing-time. Graval was not a bad sort of man. He was simply commonplace—one of those persons, of whom there are many in all ranks of society, who, neither bad from habit nor good from want of temptation, are governed by the ordinary feelings of their class, and distinguished from one another only by almost imperceptible differences. They go through life playing their parts and getting on, and being looked up to, making fairly good husbands and fathers. They seldom give occasion for either praise or blame. They are not loved; neither are they disliked: they are put up with. This Graval had made a very passable Member, always voting with the majority, and doing his work on Committees well; speaking rarely, and never interrupting others. There was no reason for their putting him into the House, any more than there was any reason for the electors withdrawing their support from him, beyond the fact that he had ended by communicating his own supineness to them. For want of anything better to do, he had now taken to praiseworthy historical researches, which would probably end by landing him in the Institute. In short, he was "an excellent match," as Mdme. De Quérieux said; for, besides his undoubted

personal merits, he had an ample fortune, and, having always been a moderate liver, was still vigorous at forty-five. Michael sought in vain to recall the man by anything more striking than pepper-and-salt whiskers, straight, grizzly hair, a thick neck, and gold spectacles. He used to sit on the Left, near the centre of the House, fingering papers, listening with half-closed eyes, and sometimes sleeping as if he had over-eaten himself.

But why did Graval want Blanche? Why, firstly, because it was time he was married. Then, he liked her for her fortune, her beauty, her youth, and her social position. Perhaps, too, her well-known friendship with Teissier weighed for something with him. In old days, although voting against him, Graval had always kept on good terms with Teissier, whose success, he instinctively felt, was only a question of time. Once married to Blanche, he would doubtless try to make up to Teissier; for he had not wholly given up political ambition, and still cherished the idea of getting back into the Chamber. Once back there, he would transfer his seat from the Left Centre to the Right Centre; so that, just as he had sat with the Jacobins when they were in the ascendant, he would now be on the other side, when it, in turn, was gaining ground. This was the man

who was to possess Blanche: who would have a right to her caresses, and would absorb her very life! With merciless exactness, Michael pictured to himself the slow but sure tragedy, whose every incident he could follow day by day: the gradual debasing of the exquisite mind that he loved: its absorption, bit by bit, in Graval's inferior, commonplace nature, as a lovely flower is robbed by a gross insect of its perfumed honey! Such was the vulgar, respectable, and well-ordered life that a skilful combination of duty, custom, and conventionality had decreed for her. It was for this most right and proper programme that he was to sacrifice the last vestige of his guilty love. The last letter that he would write to Blanche, the last words he would exchange with her, would be to urge her to this self-immolation. That was right! while all the exaltation, and enthusiasm, and unselfishness, the noble thoughts and high ideals excited in him by Blanche, which he must now abandon for ever, were wrong! Social order virtue, conventionality, morality,—all the gods for whom Teissier had fought and suffered,—willed it so.

In his hour of trial his faith in them began to waver, when he felt how powerless they were to dislodge the enemy in his heart; and he had

to call, in despair, on his own better self to assure himself that the sacrifice must be made. In no uncertain voice, it told him that it must. Again he sought refuge in the plea that if he must give up Blanche it ought to be to a more worthy rival. Then he flouted the thought, for he knew it would have been no less hard to do so in any case. Passion is always selfish; and, try as he would to glorify his own, it was tarred with the same brush, and liable to the same weaknesses, as any other. He saw it well enough now that the critical moment had come. His love may have been unusually self-conscious and intense; for he suffered as from keen physical pain, and sat on, powerless to stir from his seat, and dead to all that was taking place round him. When one of his colleagues casually came up to speak to him on some business matter, the necessary effort of listening and answering exhausted him. He was choked by emotions over which he was rapidly losing control, and he dreaded to break down before the whole House. He felt so lonely, so terribly lonely, amid the noise, and talking, and among the people, all of whom he had met daily for years, and to not one of whom could he turn for sympathy in his hour of agony. If they got to know of it they would only laugh with indulgent raillery, or grati-

fied spite, according as they were his friends or his foes; for, whether friendly or hostile, they entertained an equally false idea of him. He was conscious of nothing now but overwhelming revulsion from himself, and from everyone; and from his work, his speeches, his plans, his aspirations. He was possessed by a wild longing to get away—no matter where—so that he might be alone with himself and silence.

He rose at last, and went out, and wandered about the streets. The roar of carriages, omnibuses, and passers-by, seemed to rock his thoughts to rest; and a blessed numbness came to still his pain after awhile. It vanished as soon as he got home, at dinner-time.

As usual, he had friends to dinner, who endeavoured to turn the talk on subjects that interested him. The day's debate, naturally, was the main topic of conversation. They were all amazed at the Ministerial victory, which had been more thorough than even Combel himself could have hoped for; and then someone hazarded the remark—

"The Opposition did not attack as vigorously as it might have done."

Michael was hardly listening; but he had heard the observation, and said, drily,—

"The Opposition does not care to fight on such grounds."

His manner was sharp and harsh; and some of his guests exchanged expressive looks.

"What's the matter with him?" said one.

"He is in a bad temper," another suggested, whispering.

An awkward silence fell on everybody, until a welcome remark came to break it.

"It is only a Pyrrhic victory for the Cabinet —a last dying kick."

"I don't know about that," said Michael. "Combel is a very clever fellow, and the Jacobins have still got a solid majority."

Then he relapsed into his previous state, appearing to hear and to see nothing, not even the looks by which Suzanne sought to attract his attention: so she rose from table as a last resource, to try and rouse him from his fit of silence.

As soon as they got back to the drawing-room, Michael, offering the excuse of pressing work, left his guests, and withdrew to his study, where, in its friendly and familiar silence, he could, at all events, suffer undisturbed. For the first time for many years, tears came to his relief,—tears, not of sorrow, but of tender sympathy for Blanche's pain,

which. although so much deeper than his, would have to be borne in resignation and silence. He sobbed to think of the unique charm of her lovely nature, which he alone had understood, or ever would understand; and of the long, slow years before her, in which her heart would slowly bleed to death, till nothing was left behind but callousness and oblivion; and he quivered with anguish. Would she believe that he still loved her, and that it was on her account he was sacrificing his feelings? Who could say but that her womanly pride would prevent her seeing his action in the true light? Women are like that, they say. They resent being given up, and never will believe that a love which a man fights against may possibly be stronger than one he yields to. In his despair, he said to himself, "What can it matter if she does?" If we consent to be cruel, we must be prepared to be misunderstood. Pain is the common lot, and love is only an acute form of it.

Then he prayed, who never prayed before, and who had looked on religion as a social force. He asked to be given courage to make this supreme sacrifice, and that it might be softened to Blanche and to him; and, as he prayed, a light seemed to break in on his soul. Earthly cares had hitherto stood between him and higher things, and the

world to come. He thought of it all now. It seemed his last hope: why turn from it? Why should not there be an unseen world, where the nobler feelings of our hearts, overgrown by earthly weeds, should flourish unchecked? Why should our yearnings for undying love be but a delusion and a snare? Why should not Blanche, although separated from him by stern and cruel duty, be his there some day? He wept, and prayed, and imagined vain things, and let foolish notions that would have made his friends smile, float through his mind. Hours passed away. Then someone came knocking at the door, and he answered:

"I am working, and must not be disturbed."

He recognized Suzanne's step as she walked away; and then he reverted to his own thoughts. Gradually he became less acutely depressed, and more fit, in consequence, to decide on his course of action. He could not bring himself to see Blanche, and tell her, face to face, "You had better marry Graval." She would have seen that he did not mean it in his heart, and it was his heart only that she would listen to. He would, therefore, have to write to her. How? He cast about him for words that would not come, and began sentences he could not finish. Still, something had to be done: so he took up his pen, and, repressing any sign

of love as best he could, he wrote, slowly, as follows:

"I have seen your mother to-day, Blanche; and she has begged me to speak, or write, to you, and, as she put it, use my influence in order to induce you to accept the proposal of marriage that has been made to you. I could not command myself sufficiently to see or speak to you on the subject. It will, perhaps, be better for me to write.

"My day has been agonizing beyond all expression. It has reawakened all the past in my heart, and made me more than ever aware that my love for you is as living and strong as in the days when I had you by my side. I know how much more trying the sacrifice is for you than for me: for to you it means the surrender, not only of your life, but of yourself. I feel—would I could tell you how deeply!—and know, what infinite suffering is before us, much as we long, and look for, happiness; and that the gulf betwixt us, howsoever wide, will have to be made wider. For I know that hitherto, although separated ourselves, our thoughts were always together: we were no more apart than before, for our inner life we spent with each other. And it was sweet to think that you were still near me, with nothing between us but distance.

"But if you accept this proposal, Blanche, there is an end of it all, an end of our hope and our heart's dream, which almost seems happiness compared with what is before us now. Yet it must be so: for the sake of the long life that is, in all probability, before you, and for your future happiness, in which I must have no share. I do not want that by your unselfish love you should be condemned to the dreary loneliness of a solitary old age, or the wretchedness of a life differing in any way from the common lot. It might even be better for me too. I love you still, Blanche, and always shall. But when you are another's—ah me! I can scarcely hold my trembling pen, or find words, for I must not say to you what I fain would! How can I make-believe to urge on you what my whole soul revolts against? What am I to say? I know you well enough to be certain that you have already told yourself all that can be said; and a voice whispers to me that if you have refused you must be right. No, no! you are not right! There is another, and a stronger, voice to be heard, Blanche,—that of Duty. Life wills it should be so. It has decided that you are to belong to a man incapable of understanding or loving you. But he is not unworthy, and it will be your mission to raise him by slow degrees to your own

level. Yes: life demands this monstrous thing of you; and I, who shrink from the horror of it, have to tell you to yield. It has cost me long hours of prayer and tears. I am telling you so in the silence of night, that takes no heed of the anguish it conceals. I say it, after asking God for strength, and that He will vouchsafe us both the will and courage for the sacrifice.

"Blanche, my darling! this is the last time I shall ever write to you—and I cannot help recalling the letters I sent to you only a very few months ago! We may be dragged at Life's chariot-wheels, but we shall go on living as if we had no hearts to bleed to death. We shall meet, and our faces must tell each other nothing! Farewell! I can only repeat the pitiless verdict, 'It must be so.' I will not cast about me for further arguments. What would be the use? The same voice that speaks to my conscience, alas! will speak to yours! Good-bye. You must not doubt me; for never have I loved you as now, when I am going to lose you.

MICHAEL."

Next day, Teissier did not go out at all. He spent it shut up in his study, turning over papers, and pretending to work, while awaiting her answer.

It came in the evening, and was brought to him by a servant. There were only two lines, unsigned.

"I will obey you, Michael; and have just told my mother so. She will thank you. Farewell!"

He turned and twisted and analyzed this note for hours, trying to find out what it really meant, examining the handwriting, which looked to him unsteady, and affected by nervousness. "I will obey you . . . . my mother will thank you." Were these two short sentences written in wounded and bitter irony, while she was trembling under indignant pride? or did they mean only what they said? Did she wish him to understand, from her obedience, that it was a last effort of supreme devotion, and, from her delicate reserve, that she surrendered the right, accorded to victims, of complaining? Or was she simply and solely acquiescing in his strong advice without any answering chord in her own conscience? Who knew? Perhaps she thought "At all events, it will be finished and done with." Perhaps she foresaw the dawn of a new life. How could she know or guess at what it had cost him to write the despairing letter which she accepted as a command? There was no means of getting an answer to those questions, or discovering anything respecting Blanche's feelings. All was over. Thenceforward

those two short lines were all he should ever get from her. They were the last token of their love.

As the dinner-hour drew near, Michael came out of his room, telling Suzanne, whose distrustful eye was on him, that he was tired, and going out for a turn.

"Shall you not come back to dinner?"

"Perhaps. I don't know."

He wandered, like a lost soul, through the streets, where formerly he used to meet Blanche and went past her house. Unperceived by her, he saw her getting out of the carriage; the sight of her filled him with an indescribable emotion that almost frightened him, and with a yearning tenderness that rent his heart-strings. It came like a flash of lightning in the darkness. He almost doubted the evidence of his senses, and was left with a greater longing than ever to see her, face to face, for the last time.

That evening, there was a reception at the President's. Michael had been there once, merely to show his adherence to the Republic. He knew that the De Quérieux went into the official world, and thought it probable that they would go to it, and drag Blanche there, too, with her *fiancé*. So he went home, and dressed, and, with-

out saying whither he was going, went to the Elysée.

As he passed through the rooms, he was followed by the flattering murmur of recognition which usually accompanies well-known public men. Grave personages asked one another what his unaccustomed presence meant. They commented on the cordial greeting between him and the President; they watched his every movement. Teissier took no notice. He mechanically shook the hands that were held out, and as absently answered the commonplace questions addressed to him. Had he listened, he might have heard the bystanders round him whispering,

"Something's amiss with him. What can it be?"

But he was not listening. And when his restless eye searched among the crowd, they whispered anew:

"He is looking for someone."

The first face Michael singled out was that of Graval, with his irreproachably trimmed grey whiskers, and his lack-lustre eyes behind gold spectacles. He tried to avoid him, but failed. Graval had caught sight of him, and came up, beaming, and holding out his hand with aggressive cordiality.

"I am so delighted to see you, my dear sir, to thank you! Yes: to thank you,—for I know you were consulted. I cannot tell you how honoured I feel by all the kind things you have said of me. It was all settled this morning—I got my final answer at twelve o'clock;—and the wedding will take place as soon as possible. My fair bride counts on you to give her away—naturally: you have been so good to her;—but, of course, you will see her yourself. She is to be here this evening."

He poured out all this in a semi-confidential way, without waiting for any answer; and each word was a stab in Teissier's heart. Graval, proud of showing his intimacy with him in public, had, as he spoke, gradually pushed him into a corner, and cut him off from everyone by standing in front of him. With the unruffled complacency of a man pleased with himself, he turned the conversation on political matters, lowering his voice as though they were discussing something important. Everyone noticed it, and asked:

"What can they have to talk about so long?"

Diel, who had just arrived, and had witnessed the little scene, managed to get behind Graval, and, touching him on the shoulder, said, "I congratulate you, my dear fellow."

"Have you heard it already?" cried Graval.

"Of course, I have. Everything gets known instantly."

He turned his unfriendly eye on Teissier as he passed, with a keen and searching glance, meant to probe his very soul, and ferret out some injurious secret.

"Is it to be believed?" said Graval. "It has only been settled a few hours!"

"Nothing nowadays can be kept secret," answered Michael.

That was the only sentence that Graval could drag out of him; and he tried to amplify it by a running commentary.

"How right you are, my dear sir! 'Nothing can be kept secret'! People meddle with all sorts of things that don't concern them. No one who is in the slightest degree notorious can raise a finger without everyone knowing it. No, indeed, nothing can be kept secret!"

At length, seeing that nothing more was to be got out of Michael, and doubtful whether he was offended with him or not, Graval went away, and left him to disappear in the ever-thickening crush of dress coats and low gowns. For a few minutes Teissier wandered through the suite of rooms, continually addressed by obtrusive friends; when, suddenly, as Peyraud was speaking to him, his heart

leaped into his mouth. The De Quérieux, who did not see him, were passing a little way off, followed by Blanche. She caught sight of him, and, stopping short and turning towards him, grew deadly pale, gave him one long look, and then moved on, just as M. De Quérieux turned to look for her. Michael also became so pale, and cast such a longing look towards her, that Peyraud involuntarily followed the direction of his eyes, but without detecting where they fell. The crowd round them whispered, "We must read '*Order*' tomorrow, and find out what he's after."

Teissier shook hands with the journalist, and made as though he were leaving. But he could not make up his mind to go. He wanted to see her once more: she looked exquisite in her delicate pink dress, but so deathly sad. He retraced his steps, and worked his way back through the rooms to find her on the arm of the smiling and attentive Graval. He could not bear it. Fate willed that his dream should be dispelled. So he went away.

"What can he have come for?" asked everyone, as they stood about in groups. "He spoke to scarcely anyone but Graval."

Peyraud, who was asking himself the same question, heard Diel's sibilant voice saying:

"Graval and he are going to be cronies. You have heard, of course, that Graval is going to marry an intimate friend of his, a Mdlle. Estève, that slight, fair, girl, just coming out of the next room. Teissier, it seems, made up the match."

It was two days later, before Michael could summon up courage to say to Suzanne at breakfast,

"I have a piece of news that will interest you. Mdlle. Estève is going to be married."

Suzanne gave a look of surprise, not wholly devoid of suspicion.

"Oh! And to whom?"

"To Graval, the historian and late deputy."

She hesitated, but could not help indulging her scornful temper.

"Quite a good match!"

Then, seeing she had hurt Michael, she was sorry.

"Did they consult you?" she asked.

"Yes: I was consulted," he answered, drily.

She longed to rise from table and go over to Michael, and take his head in her hands, and say to him, "You have done well, and I love you"; but she did not: something restrained her, and she sat still, inwardly conning over the announcement. Blanche might marry; but she would stand, none the less, between them, for

Michael loved her still. What availed it that the chasm between the lovers should be widened? What mattered one obstacle more or less? Their hearts would overleap them all. They no longer saw one another, and were utterly miserable; but they loved all the same. Then an evil thought flashed across her mind: Who knew but that this marriage, far from separating them, might not bring them together? Maybe, they were doing it with that object She was silent for a little, and then said, pointedly, "I hope she will be happy."

Michael made no answer.

Suddenly, Laurel, who had listened with unusual gravity, cried out: "When I'm grown up I will marry mother."

"Silly! No one can marry their mother," observed Annie.

Suzanne kissed her little girl, who asked, "Is it true?"

Michael never even smiled.

When they had finished their meal, husband and wife rose, and went each their own way, without one kindly word or look.

VII.

There is a tragic monotony in a life led, apparently, in the full light of day, full of many

and various interests, but in reality given up to one absorbing secret. Some go through life playing their parts before a public whom they influence and lead, and win fame and fortune. They are admired and envied and thought lucky, and are supposed to be in a position to give full scope to the best qualities of their higher nature.

But it is not so. In their heart of hearts, there is often something stronger than their actions, more absorbing than their ambition; and, while one set of feelings expands at its ease, and in its own way, another has to be crushed and cramped in inward pain and grief, deep down within their hearts. To the world, they seem to have everything; yet often the only thing they really care for is denied them.

Teissier had never been more active, more influential, wiser, or more cautious in his public conduct, than during the weeks that followed the crisis we have described. His unaccountable inaction at the time when Colonial Supplies were being discussed was soon forgotten; and even those members of his Party who were most angry at the time now attributed his silence to some deep-laid, cunning plan, and ceased commenting on it. To see him in the Chamber, and listen to him

in Committee, to read the articles in '*Order*' that were inspired, if not written, by him, one would never have guessed that this plucky combatant was living but a half life, and that the moment he withdrew from the whirl of words and action he felt as if his brain must give way. Often in the midst of a discussion on finance, or on the passing of some new Bill, his thoughts would wander, and he would take part in it, mechanically, with his usual lucidity, while his mind was far away. At such times all sorts of wild plans passed through his sick brain. One of the wildest was to run away with Blanche the evening that the contract was signed; or else on the actual day of the wedding, in the interval between the civil and the religious ceremonies, or from the breakfast. He would amuse himself arranging all the ingenious details of the romantic incident. They were both to be firm till the last, and determined to accomplish their sacrifice; but, when the fatal day should come, maddened by the thought of Blanche's belonging to another, he was to go up to her and say,

"Come!"

And she would understand him instantly, and reply,

"I am coming."

She would follow him in her wedding gown; and with her on his arm, they were to walk through the crowd of guests, so boldly that no one should suspect anything; and they would disappear. The magnitude of the scandal would be its own excuse.

All the time that he plotted thus, Michael never lost sight of what Suzanne's state of despair and humiliation would be, of the desolation of his worse-than-orphaned children, of his deserted hearth, and of the cup of shame and remorse he would have to drink, with the partner in his guilt. He smiled at his own foolish imaginings. Yet, for whom and what was he giving them up? His house was scarce a home to him any longer. He felt a stranger there, under the suspicious eye of Suzanne, entrenched between Annie and Laurel, who never now had a smile for their father. He lived surrounded by the ruins of his home, which silently reproached him for the sorrow he had brought about; and he kept repeating to himself that those of his own household were driving him away.

During the last week before the signing of the contract, which the De Quérieux intended to be a most imposing function, Michael received, by post, the following letter from Blanche:

"I never thought, Michael, that I should have

occasion to write to you again; yet I must do so at all cost. If not, I shall go mad! To whom am I to turn if not to you? I never had anyone but you; and it is so still, in spite of all that divides us. I implore you to help me, and tell me what I must do.

"It is about my marriage. Until now I have taken it calmly enough. The date was uncertain, and I was perfectly indifferent concerning M. Graval. I had promised myself to try and make him happy. It would not have been fair that he should suffer for our fault. We had already been the cause of quite misery enough to those around us. Still, I told him, from the beginning, that I did not care for him, and was only marrying in order to be like other people, and, above all, to get away from a home that grew daily more odious to me. I imagined that he too was marrying for reasons of very much the same sort. Now, it seems, he has fallen in love with me; and, as I have become aware of it, I no longer feel indifference, but actual dislike for him. What right has he to love me? Doesn't he know I love another? Can't he see it? Isn't it written on my face? I despise him for being so cowardly as to want to marry me, and taking advantage of my unprotected position to force himself on me.

"I did not know what I was doing when I consented at the time. Anything seemed preferable to continuing to accept the humiliating hospitality of my step-father, and I fancied I could marry anyone who would take me away from this house where everything is so distasteful to me. And then, you wished it, and I thought I could obey you. I tell you again, I didn't know! I didn't know! But, now that I see and understand it all, I can't.

"This evening, or rather yesterday evening (for I am writing at two in the morning), we were in the drawing-room. My *fiancé* had brought me a lovely Louis XV. casket. I was touched by the attention, and meant to be nice to him. My mother made some excuse for leaving the room. I was in a perfect agony of mind at being left alone with him. He saw it in my face.

"'What's the matter, Blanche?' he asked. 'You are trembling. One would think you were afraid of me.'

"Yes: I *am* afraid of him! As I did not answer, he took my hands and kissed them. And then—I don't know what I did, Michael: I lost my head, snatched them from him, and ran away, and locked myself into my room.

"I won't allow him to come near me, Michael. I

can't, and won't! I had rather go into a convent, or die! I know I can't be yours; but I won't be anybody else's. I counted on myself too much! I can't bear him! He makes me shudder. Besides, I was playing an odious part in deceiving a worthy man, whose worst fault is that he isn't you. How could *you*, who are so loyal, advise me to live such a lie?

"I don't know what they may have settled among themselves downstairs. Someone has been to knock at my door; but I did not answer, and they went away. No doubt they will give me the night to think it over, hoping it may bring wiser counsel. But, to-morrow, the storm will burst! I shall have to tell them that I won't marry M. Graval. I quail to think of the scene I shall have to go through.

"I implore you to come to my aid. My courage has failed, my pretended resignation has broken down, and I am utterly miserable. I can't tell you all I have gone through in this house. Since I left all of you, I have not had one kind look, not one word of sympathy. I feel hopelessly cast away, drifting I know not where, and afraid of myself and everybody.

"To-morrow morning I shall go out early, before anyone is up, and post this letter myself, so that you may get it in good time. Listen to the

promptings of your heart only, Michael. If you still love me ever so little, come to my assistance! My only hope is in you. Until you tell me what to do, I shall absolutely refuse to answer one word or do anything. Whatever you decide, I promise faithfully to do: short, of course, of allowing you to urge my marriage. But you would not be so cruel: you must know I cannot do it: and, perhaps, you may be able to induce them to give up worrying me about it, and to leave me alone.

"If there is no other possible way out, and nowhere in the world for me to go and hide myself and my sorrow, as hundreds of others do, well, I suppose I must go into a convent, though I refused to do so at Lyons. I often recall what Abbé Goudal said to me at the time we were first separated. I repeat it over to myself, and understand it better now. It has borne fruit during my long months of anguish. I loathe the idea of a convent. I have not faith enough for it, and could only take a heartache there with me. But I should, at all events, find peace and quiet; and in time, perhaps, my mind, too, would find rest. It seems incredible at present that it should: I am so shaken and crushed. But I know the cloister has often soothed griefs as bitter as mine, and I am willing and anxious to try it.

"If I could only take refuge with you, Michael, new life would return to me, and I should be myself again. But I know how impossible that is, and I will try to be sensible. You must find some way of taking me out of this house; where to I care not. You can do it: they will listen to you. Tell Suzanne, I implore you, that you do not feel justified in casting me off altogether. Tell her that you must see me once more, for the last time, so as to arrange about my miserable existence. She is good, and will surely understand, and allow you to take some interest in me, and deliver me from this unbearable burden, and send me somewhere—anywhere, provided it be far away.

"It is now so late, or rather, so early, that it is not worth while to go to bed. I will lie on the sofa until it is time to go out. If I could only fall asleep, and wake up to find all that has happened during the last three years only a bad dream! O to wake up in my own little room at Annecy, with the sun shining through the curtains, and have to hurry to get dressed, lest I should be late, as we are all going off on an expedition together! You did not love me in those days, and I was so happy!

"But why recall the days that never can return? The present, alas! is with us, in all its terrible

reality. Michael, dear Michael, come to my help! —not because you love me, but because you adopted me as a daughter, and you are all I have to look to!

BLANCHE."

Teissier was re-reading this letter, and a thousand miles away from the cares of business, when Suzanne walked into his study. It was an unusual thing for her to do, as she had given up coming there for some time back; and Michael started when he saw her, as if suddenly awakened out of a dream.

"What is it? What do you want?" he asked.

Suzanne sat down, slowly and deliberately, as if she had something serious to say.

"Something has occurred that I must speak to you about," she said, in a voice that trembled a little. "I have just had a visit from Mdme. De Quérieux. She had been to look for you at the Chamber; but, not finding you there, she came on here. Fearing she would disturb you, I told her you were not in."

Michael frowned.

"You are very careful of my time," he said, ironically.

"I assure you I did not think she had anything

important to say," explained Suzanne,—"I really didn't. I had no other reason. So I saw her myself."

She paused, waiting for a question that did not come, and then went on :

"She wanted to speak with you; she was in great trouble. It seems that Mdlle. Estève says she is going to break off her engagement, and will listen to nobody."

They were silent for a little. Michael seemed thinking, and gazed into space.

"I know it," he said at last.

Suzanne made an angry gesture, but promptly repressed it.

"Already?" she cried. "You know it already? And how?"

Michael took up Blanche's letter, and handed it to her.

"Read," he said, gently.

The letter shook in Suzanne's hand as she read it.

"What do you mean to do, then?" she said, as she folded it up again.

Michael rose, and, after pacing up and down the room several times, sat down again.

"I am going to see her about it," he said at last.

"See her? Why see? Won't writing do?"

"No: it won't. I want to talk to her; I want to tell her what I have already written. She took my advice once, and will take it again—I mean about this marriage, which must be, both for her sake and mine."

"And you will tell her so? Are you able to? Do you no longer love her, then?"

There was a slight touch of exultant joy in her voice.

"I will tell her so: I shall be able to," repeated Michael.

He paused. Understanding all that was left unsaid, Suzanne grew grave again.

"If you still love her at all," she said, in a subdued voice, "you ought not to see her!"

"I must see her, whether or not," replied Michael, with gentle persistency.

She looked searchingly at him, seeking to discover whether his words were an answer to her eager question. He was absolutely impassive. It was an unnatural calm, such as might easily mislead those too preoccupied to notice it.

"If you still love her at all," she repeated,——

Then, stopping short, as if she had changed her mind, a sudden gush of tenderness came over her. She went up to her husband, and, putting her

arms round his neck, kissed him gently, with all her old affection.

"Michael!"

He pressed her to his bosom, with an ill-repressed sob, as if his heart was touched by the unexpected caress.

"I will trust you," she said. "You may go! I know you will do what is right."

Then she went away, and left him alone.

Michael was unmanned for a moment. Then he got up, and muttered, low and irresolutely,—

"What is right! And what is right? Yes: I must,—"

He rang, and ordered his carriage, and while it was being got ready he dressed, and then drove to the De Quérieuxs. He had not crossed the threshold for months, and the new servants did not know him.

"Please tell Mdlle. Estève," he said, "that M. Teissier would like to see her."

He was shown into the little sitting-room of which Blanche, who spent as little time as possible with her parents, had the exclusive use. It was in the refined, simple, almost severe, taste that he knew so well; and it recalled, like a perfume, the memory of dear old days. The footman who had gone to announce him returned shortly.

"Mdlle. begs you will wait for her here: she will come directly."

As he waited, nervously, he went to the piano, and turned over a score of *Lohengrin;* and thence to a table on which lay a volume of Sully Prudhomme's Poems. He took up the little vellum-bound book, and opened it at the page where the ribbon-marker was. Preoccupied though he was, his attention was arrested by the verses.—

"Les lèvres qui veulent s'unir,
A force d'art et de constance,
Malgré le temps et la distance,
Y peuvent toujours parvenir.

"On se fraie toujours des routes:
Flots, monts, déserts, n'arrêtent point,
De proche en proche on se rejoint,
Et les heures arrivent toutes.

"Mais ce qui fait durer l'exil
Mieux que l'eau, le roc ou le sable,
C'est un obstacle infranchissable
Qui n'a pas l'épaisseur d'un fil.

"C'est l'honneur. Aucun stratagème,
Nul âpre effort n'en est vainqueur,
Car tout ce qu'il oppose au cœur,
Il le puise dans le cœur même.

"Vous savez s'il est rigoureux,
Pauvres couples à l'âme haute
Qu'une noble horreur de la faute
Empêche seule d'être heureux.

"Penchés sur le bord de l'abîme,
Vous respectez au fond de vous,
Comme de cruels garde-fous,
Les arrêts de ce juge intime.

"Purs amans sur terre égarés,
Quel martyre étrange est le vôtre!
Plus vos cœurs sont près l'un de l'autre,
Plus ils se sentent séparés.

"O! que de fois fermente et gronde,
Sous un air de froid nonchaloir,
Votre souriant désespoir
Dans la mascarade du monde!

"Que de cris toujours contenus!
Que de sanglots sans délivrance!
Sous l'apparente indifférence,
Que d'héroïsmes méconnus!

"Aux ivresses, même impunies,
Vous préférez un deuil plus beau,
Et vos lèvres, même au tombeau,
Attendent le droit d'être unies."

As he closed the book, and was turning to look for something else to pass the time, Blanche came in.

Her whole appearance and manner were altered. Her bearing, her movement, her attitudes, all had the weary indifference of a chronic depression, which was accentuated by a deathly pallor that gave her pinched features an almost ethereal expression. She did not hold out her hand to Teissier; but motioned him to a chair, and sat down opposite him.

"I was expecting you, dear friend," she said. "What do you come to say to me?"

Her voice was low, musical, caressingly soft, and as delicately clear as crystal. Michael did not answer at once. He was choked by emotion, and could not speak. An overpowering impulse to throw himself at her feet came over him; and he needed all his strength of will to remain calm and self-possessed. At length he stammered out, slowly, in a very low voice,—

"I have come because it was my duty to do so, Blanche,—in order to tell you what yours is."

She put out her hand, supplicatingly, to stop him.

"Don't, don't, I implore you! You only hurt me!"

"Blanche, dear Blanche," he began,

Again she interrupted him.

"If you have only come to repeat what you have said in your letter, I had rather not listen. Why do you want to tell me such things? It is quite useless. I should not believe you, and it only pains me."

"I know that, Blanche; but do you think that it does not pain me to say what it pains you so much to hear? I don't know whence I have strength given me to persuade you against my

heart and myself, and to urge you to make a sacrifice that will ruin my life, as well as your own. For the last six months, dear, I have never thought of anything but you; I have never been free from painful anxiety about you; I have loved you all the more, because I felt that we were drifting more and more apart."

Her face lit up with a flash of joy, as a woman's always does when she is told she is loved.

"Is it really so?" she said.

"You know it is; but you probably do not know the pang it is costing me to give you up. Think of my having had to shake that man's hand, and appear to congratulate him! To listen to him talking of you! Think that I shall have to give you away! Yes: I shall have to give you away to him! I never knew what the feeling of hatred was before; but I do hate him!"

She stopped him.

"You hate him, and yet you ask me to marry him."

He was disconcerted by the directness of this argument; and she went on:

"You must see how impossible it is, Michael! It is too much to ask of anyone. Do you know?—it seems horrible to me. First of all, it is disloyal—yes: disloyal, to him; for, of course, if he

knew that we loved each other, he would regard such a marriage with horror. Besides, it is horrible to marry against one's will, and without love, as I should do. I, for one, can't do it. It makes me angry with you that you should even think of it, or urge it on me so unfeelingly, as if you really wished it. If you still loved me, or ever had loved me——"

"Blanche!"

"Yes: I say, if you ever had loved me, you would not be so brave. I'm not! But then, when one loves, one isn't brave!"

The reproach of not loving always hits the mark; and women know it. It is their final argument, for how is it possible to allow them to doubt our love?

"I implore you, Blanche," cried Teissier, "not to speak to me like that! I am not made of iron, and can't hold out much longer. I am not the hero that you make me out, but only a man, a poor, weak man, standing alone, but trying to do his duty, as far as he knows it, at any cost."

"Your duty! Are you quite sure you do know it? Do you think it's your duty to force me into a marriage that I hate? Pray, what right have you to do so? If it is wrong for us to meet, or to love each other,—well, let us give up doing it. But does

that make it my duty to marry M. Graval? Be consistent, my friend. If I don't wish to marry, why should I be compelled to? Every one of you—my mother, my step-father, and you—keep worrying me about the future. I don't worry about it. Under the pretext of making my life exactly like everybody else's, you want me to sacrifice it, and deceive an honest man. Yes: deceive him; for you will never convince me that it is not acting a falsehood to give him my hand while someone else has my heart. I must ask you to think for a moment, and then see whether you will dare to tell me that I am not right and that what you want me to do is not horrible."

"You are young, Blanche, and think only of the present. You must remember that we are irrevocably separated, and that I can never have any share in making you happy. I have been most guilty in encouraging you to love me. Perhaps the future that I speak of, and am endeavouring to induce you to face, may help you to happiness of another sort. You need deceive no one, if you make him happy. How can he help being so if he is near you?"

"Bah! Those are only words!"

"Not so, I assure you. After a few years you

shall have forgotten me. Don't say you won't: nothing lasts for ever. And then——"

She got up with a gesture of despair. "Don't say anything more," she cried. "You will make me mad! I shall end by giving in, if only to stop you,—and I don't mean to give in. I won't, and I can't!"

She sank again into her chair, and went on in a low voice, her face buried in her hands.

"Oh! I wish I were dead! That would settle everything! I should have died long ago, except that I feared to leave you a legacy of regrets. It is only to spare you that I am still alive. Do let me go on loving you, from a distance, without ever seeing or hearing you! Especially without hearing you speak as you have done."

And then, at last, she burst into tears, overcome, and unable any longer to control, or conceal, her grief. Michael fought hard with himself. He looked at her for a moment, a poor, broken woman, quivering and shaking with sobs, given over to hopeless, inconsolable grief. Carried away by a tempest of feeling, he threw himself at her feet.

"No! Blanche, no!" he cried: "I will never again say what you don't wish to hear! I will never again ask you to sacrifice yourself to a

man whom you cannot love! Listen to me. I will only tell you I love you, I love you, I love you! Nothing more, and nothing else! My darling, don't go on crying! I cannot bear it! Look! I am yours, yours only! I can hold out no longer; my strength is gone. I am yours for ever!"

He unclasped her hands and covered them with kisses, and dried her tears with his lips. A smile of joy lit up her eyes, still glistening with tears; but she pushed him gently away from her.

"You ought not to have come," she said. "You ought to have left me alone to go my own way, quietly, and not troubled about me."

"I could not get you out of my mind," answered Michael. "It was too much to ask of me! We love each other too much! It is not our fault."

He would have kissed her; but she drew back.

"No! no!" said Blanche, hiding her face with her hands; but Michael drew her to him.

"I will never leave you again," he said. "You are mine—for ever."

"You must not say that!" she murmured; but he went on, vehemently:

"It cannot go on as it is! Life is short, and love like ours is torture. You must be mine, in spite of everybody and everything. I don't see

how, as yet; but so it must be. I shall not say 'Good-bye' this time; for I will return, and carry you off!"

She was standing up, with his arms round her. He kissed her hair, her brow, her lips; and then, tearing himself away, he left her utterly overcome, and quivering in every limb.

The state of exaltation to which he had given way lasted for a short time, and he surrendered himself to it without reflection. The scene he had just gone through had snapped all the old ties that once had bound him to duty, family affection, and social position. So much the worse for them! There was an end of struggling and striving. It was total surrender, and he felt the demoralization that so often seizes us in the presence of the Inevitable and the Irrevocable.

As was usual with him at times of violent mental emotion, Teissier felt an intense need of physical exercise. He dismissed his carriage and wandered off on foot, through by-streets, where he could hold forth, unnoticed, plead his own cause, gesticulate, and talk to himself. By the time he reached his own door, to which the force of habit led him, he was more collected; and he remembered that Suzanne would be awaiting him, knowing whence he came, and that he must either let her know

all or invent fresh falsehoods. He had not given a thought to what he should say; but felt he must make up his mind now, or never. So again he set off on an aimless walk, to gain time and think it over. Despite his recent excitement, he and everything else were exactly where they were before. The storm of impulse which had carried him away had brought him back to the starting-point, and the pressure of duty lay on him more tyrannically, more heavily, more unalterably than ever. His choice must be made now, just as on the day when Suzanne discovered his secret. The same problem was before him: only more urgently, because of all that had occurred since, and of all the thoughts, both sweet and sad, that had unconsciously led him back in a circle to where he had started from. Yes: he must choose, like any stage hero, between duty and love; and this time his choice would be irrevocable. How could he be in doubt? One line of conduct, and one only, was open to him: to take up his pen and write once more to Blanche what he had already written, and let things take their course. No! no! That course had ceased to be possible: he was no longer free to do that now. Their kisses pledged them to each other. Even now he thirsted for more. Their memory banished all else from his mind, and he smiled to himself when

he thought of them. Must he say to Suzanne, "I cannot help it: I love her best—better than my children or my duty. She must be mine, at any price"? There was no alternative, no middle term, no compromise; and the wretched man murmured to himself,—

"I can't! I can't!"

Time was flying, and the hours seemed all too short, when Michael turned his steps slowly homeward, the beads of anguish on his brow. For a moment the idea of death floated through his brain. Death would settle everything! He repelled it. Like a plucky wrestler, he would hold on to the last. Death, in his case, would settle nothing, and only throw on others the burden he was too craven to bear. Nevertheless, he felt the temptation. How sweet to exchange Death for Love! They were almost akin! Then Michael, suddenly, felt the touch of Blanche's lips on his. Ah! They were life to him, now; and he could not forego them! Once more he reached his own door, and walked quickly in.

Annie and Laurel were coming down the stairs with their nurse, and called out to him,—

"How do you do, father?"

He made no answer, but went into the little sitting-room.

As Michael had anticipated, Suzanne was waiting for him.

At first, she had looked to see him return bearing a simple solution of their difficulties: hoping against all probability with the fatuous blindness of her sex. She had spent the time in reviewing their position, admiring her husband's firmness, pitying Blanche, and congratulating herself,—Heaven save the mark!—on having been able to carry her point so firmly. She had felt tender and kind, promising herself to soothe his pain by demonstrations of unwonted affection and quasi-maternal caresses. As time went by, she had become alarmed. What could he be doing? Their interview could not have lasted so long! She had sought in vain for satisfactory answers to the question. Doubts had crossed her mind; but she had put them aside, determined not to insult him by doubting, determined to persuade herself that everything was sure to turn out right. She had tried to think of something else, and had occupied herself with giving orders to the servants. But it had been no use. The all-pervading thought kept her in a state of fever and tension. Oh! why did he not come back?

The moment he entered the room, a sudden intuition told her she was mistaken, and that a

change had come over him. This consciousness was so sudden and bitter that she nearly broke down, and had to make a desperate effort to steady her voice before she could ask:

"Well?"

Michael sat down without answering, looking like a doomed man. There was a painful silence for some moments.

"Well?" repeated Suzanne, with a tremor in her voice. "Is it all settled?"

"No: it can't be settled," murmured Michael.

She stood up, angrily.

"Won't she obey you, then? Does she love you too much to do it?"

There was a fresh pause, which Suzanne brought to an end, at length, by asking:

"And what about you?"

As he still remained silent, she repeated her question, almost defiantly.

"And what about you? Go on. Speak! I insist on being told. And what about you?"

"Oh! I——" he began.

She broke in, again:

"Then, you still love her?"

"I ought not to have seen her again," he whispered, in a scarcely audible voice.

Suzanne could not restrain a cry of anguish.

She saw it all now. Slowly recovering herself, she groaned aloud,—

"Ah! why do you tell me?"

She began to cry. Ah! those tears—those woman's tears! Michael rose, and came to her; but what was he to say? He had been able to soothe Blanche; but he was powerless now. He dared not even take her hand, or kiss her brow. The only words that came were cold and commonplace.

"Things remain exactly where they were. We need not see each other, if you wish it."

Suzanne did not raise her head. She went on weeping, gently, silently, helplessly; and each tear, shed for his fault, fell like molten lead upon his heart.

"Suzanne!" he cried.

She did not stir. He tried to take her hand, hesitatingly.

She pushed him gently away,

"No! no!"

He stood meekly and sorrowfully before her, and could only whisper,—

"What can I do? What can I do?"

"I should like to be alone for a little," she said.

And he left her.

Suzanne went on crying softly for a minute or

two; then she stopped, and her face regained its usual expression. She went up to her room; and, having smoothed her hair and bathed her poor swollen, eyes, she went to the children's nursery, and, kissing them, listened to their little chatter, and helped Laurel in her difficulties with a game of Patience.

"Do you know where your master is?" she asked the nurse, casually.

"I saw him go up to his study, madame."

As Suzanne was turning to go, Laurel clung to her.

"Don't go, mother. Stay a little longer with us!"

Wise little Annie added, "Just a little longer."

"No," said Suzanne: "I must go to father now."

So she kissed them, and went up to Michael's room.

He had not expected to see her; and was all the more astonished when he saw the marked change in her manner and appearance. Her face bore no trace of her recent agitation. Whether from resignation, or from determination of will, her expression was calm and collected. Standing a few paces from him, she looked at him, pityingly. He looked at her, without saying a word. He knew that she came, not as an outraged

woman, to hurl reproaches at him, but as a friend to minister to him; and, in the forlorn state in which he found himself, he felt like a sick and lonely man, to whom unexpected succour comes.

Suzanne went up to him; and, laying her hand on his brow, as a tender mother might,

"Poor darling!" she said, softly.

Never till now, since she had known everything, had he fully understood the grief they shared. Anger came no longer between them. Suzanne's heart was purged from the evil that filled it, when she had angrily defended her wifely rights. She had lost the game, and all her self-love and jealousy were merged in mental suffering. She came to him now in sorrow and sympathy, mayhap with some remedy, suggested by her own heart.

"Ah!" he said. "You understand now, and forgive me!"

She answered, faintly: "Yes: I understand, and forgive you."

He took her hand, unresisted, and kissed it; and, as she went on, her voice grew steadier:

"But only after sore pain, and taking time, have I learnt to do so. I saw how painfully you, too, were striving and struggling. Why should I be angry? You have done your best. It is not your fault that you are weak."

In these last words, and the pause that followed, there was an almost imperceptible touch of contempt. It passed unnoticed by Michael: he was absorbed too much in what his wife was saying.

"I have thought it over," she continued. "Yes: I have thought it well over, during the long, lonely, hours I had at Annecy. I could think of nothing else; and I gradually learned to be resigned. I thought, for a time, that things could go on as they were. But now I see clearly how impossible that is. And do you know what I have thought of? I have hit upon the one solution. It will be painful to both of us; to you, probably, as well as to me; but it will be equally welcome."

She paused, to collect herself, and then went on, with a sad smile:

"Well? Can you not guess what it is?"

Michael shook his head.

"Nevertheless, you yourself thought of it at one time, and rejected it. But it will have to come to that, all the same."

Her voice broke as she said:

"We must get a divorce, dear."

Michael started, violently.

"What are you saying?" he cried. "Are you mad?"

She repeated, firmly:

"Yes, Michael: a divorce. It will deliver us from the intolerable situation which we neither can endure any longer. It will give you back your liberty, and be far less painful than the sort of life we now lead together."

He interrupted her.

"Please stop! You are only talking folly!"

She persisted, with conviction, and as if she, personally, were not in question.

"The best of good sense, dear; and you will soon see it, yourself. Only, you look at the objections first of all. You no doubt say to yourself, 'Divorce! When I have always opposed it? It would be contrary to all my principles, and would be the ruin of my reputation and influence.'"

Michael shook his head.

"No, Suzanne: I shouldn't say anything of the sort. If I thought the sacrifice of my position would suffice to get us out of the difficulty, I should not hesitate for a moment. As to principles—alas! I have already betrayed them. But there is you to think of, Suzanne, and the children."

"I?" she said sadly. "You need not trouble yourself about me, now! The mischief is done, as far as I'm concerned. Nothing more is left for me to suffer; a divorce will be no harder to bear

than your neglect. My grief is not the losing of you before the law, but the seeing you gradually withdraw yourself from me, until you have come at last to regard me as an enemy."

"Never, Suzanne!"

"You needn't deny it. I can read you like a book, and am not to be taken in. But don't imagine I am doing it from generosity. Nothing of the sort! If I thought that, by keeping you against your will, I could be happy yet, I should keep you. But I know that would not be the case, dear. We should be like two convicts chained together, and should end by loathing each other; and I don't want that."

"You need not be afraid of it."

She shrugged her shoulders, and went on,

"I fancied that, if you did not see her, you would forget her. That was my only reason for insisting on a complete separation. Now I see I was wrong, and that you love her more than I thought. So why should I want to keep you? Why bind you to the stake of duty against your will? I can't do it! I have too much pride, and, not enough cruelty, for that. So I will no longer stand in your way."

"Argue and reason as you may," answered Michael, "it is impossible you can believe what

you're saying. You must know perfectly well, that neither Mdlle. Estève nor I could accept so manifestly unfair an arrangement; neither should we consent to injure anyone. If the happiness of your life and my life together were really imperilled,——"

She interrupted him with her old vehemence.

"If the happiness of our life were imperilled! Is it not may I ask? I dare you to affirm that you have never thought of running away with her?"

Michael made no reply.

"You see what you have come to, poor dear! Can't you understand, now, that I want to spare both of us such a disgrace as that? I have thought out how to do it in the way least humiliating and painful for myself, and that will still leave me some shred of dignity. Me, not you; for you will rush on your fate, by legal means, or without them!"

"Beware, Suzanne! It is you who are suggesting to me a course that I want to avoid, at all costs!"

"O, you thought of it, yourself, long ago! You won't allow it now, perhaps, because it never entered your head that I should myself propose the solution you craved for. You men are such fools! You meant to arrive at it by other means. What they were I don't know, for I have never found myself in quite the same position as yours;

and your way, and mine, would not be likely to be identical. But, whatever road we each took, we have reached the same point. You are free, as you wanted to be; and I accept, and am resigned to, the position."

"Unfortunately, it is not so easy as all that. Even if you are prepared to accept it, remember that we have children, that they are girls, and that they would henceforth be the daughters of divorced parents. Remember that although divorce is recognized in France by the law, it is not recognized socially. All their life they would be under the ban. Have you ever asked yourself what their bringing-up would be like—what sort of education of the affections they would get in a home divided against itself? Remember all this, Suzanne; and try to bear, as I do, our common cross!"

Suzanne was silent for awhile, thinking over these serious objections.

"Yes," she said: "of course, there are our children. Were it not for them, I should not be here now!"

Her poor, sad face was drawn with anguish; but she went on:

"But we must be considered, too. If they have rights, so have we. I cannot sacrifice everything,

even my womanly dignity, to them. I could not, even for them, continue the life I have led since—since I have known. I couldn't! Human endurance has its limits. I have pondered over the sacrifice I should have to make, and it is too heavy for me! I cannot bear it!"

"Still, we ought to do all we can for them. Listen to me, dear. We have reached a point at which we must keep back nothing from each other; and I will lay my innermost thoughts before you. There were times when I hated you—yes: positively hated you. That time, for instance, at Annecy, when I wrote to her, and when, suspecting something, you watched me, distrustfully. There was no bond of affection between us then: nothing but a galling yoke—a chain. The idea of a divorce occurred to me, I confess; and, had it only been a question of you, I probably should not have put it aside. But I thought of those poor little girls, and felt that they had a right to every sacrifice we could make for them: that we were not our own masters, but were bound in duty to them. It is not a matter of sentiment, but of sheer duty. We must not weigh our wishes against their interests. We are bound to see that the balance is all in their favour. Hence, our divorce is impracticable."

Suzanne had listened in silence, and without visible emotion, although each word fell like a death-blow on her broken heart.

"Your frankness is delightful," she said. "Had I any illusions left, you would have dispelled them. Your argument leaves nothing to be desired in its cool logic. But do you think it will be any less disadvantageous to our children if, instead of getting a divorce, you confine yourself to simply going away with—your friend? Do you consider such a proceeding less injurious to their future?"

"But I should not go away!" exclaimed Michael, emphatically.

"How do I know that?"

"I should not go away!" he reiterated. "It has not even been suggested."

"Probably not, except by your own heart."

"Which, as you see, I am not consulting."

"Not in your cooler moments; but these are becoming ever rarer."

"They wouldn't, if you were only a little more yielding to me."

"You want to compromise? Never! Let us, above all, Michael, avoid compromises. Such a course would be disingenuous in both of us. Try as we may to walk round the difficulty, we always find ourselves back at the same point. Why

can't you come back to us, loyally, heart and soul!"

Michael interrupted her.

"Am I to be blamed for not having the strength of will to do it? It is not my fault!"

"Not your fault?" said Suzanne. "Then, perhaps, you think it's mine? But that's not the question. Had you come back to me, I repeat, frankly and unconditionally, it would not have been long before I forgave and forgot everything. But neither your wife nor your children will consent to share you with anyone. Annie and Laurel will only have a burden the more to bear through their lives, and I will teach them to bear it. At all events we shall have acquitted ourselves decently under circumstances in which people usually forfeit not only happiness, but dignity. I know not how it will be with you; but I, at least, shall not be wholly miserable at the thought that I found courage to make the sacrifice to which you were unequal. In any case, it will be better than as things are now. So, you see, dear, you must make up your mind to take back your liberty."

A terrible struggle was going on in Michael's heart. He appreciated, probably for the first time, the value of what he was about to lose: he felt

the full strength of the ties of affection and habit. He saw, in his mind's eye, his home broken up, and Suzanne with a lonely old age before her; while his children were fatherless, and dowered with the shameful inheritance he was leaving to them. The cold and careless world so easily confuses the issues between the wronger and the wronged! He saw it in its naked truth, and drops of anguish bathed his forehead. He felt Suzanne was right, and that recent events, assisted by his own weakness, irresistibly impelled him towards Blanche. He knew that the time when the voice of conscience would be stilled was inevitably coming, and that he would cease to resist. Why go on struggling? Why prolong the agony of the two women who suffered for his sake? or his own, who suffered for them? Would not the final result be only more painful the longer it was delayed?

"If I could but die!" he groaned, burying his face in his hands.

"I dare say, dear; but these things don't kill," answered Suzanne, in a calm, and slightly scornful, tone. "I can see you are giving in. You are ceasing to argue. Come, Michael! If you haven't the pluck to do your duty, why don't you do the other thing handsomely, at all events? Why do

you parley and palter? Decide on what you want to do, and do it!"

"I hate and despise myself," he replied. "I'm a mean wretch, Suzanne; but—I can't help it! I can't help it!"

The moment Michael gave in, Suzanne's attitude changed. Everything there was of affection, nay, almost maternal in her voice and manner, vanished. She rose to her feet, and standing boldly before her husband, as if she were a mere stranger who had concluded a business interview, she said, with the former tinge of contempt slightly more marked in her voice,—

"I knew you would end by seeing I am right. You took your time, and I am grateful to you for the hesitation. Now, everything is settled, once and for all; and I look to you to act without further delay. By the day after to-morrow either you, or I, must have left the house. It had better be you, I think. You will take the necessary steps in the matter, and so shall I; and our respective lawyers will arrange the details."

Drawing herself up proudly, she left the room, without casting a look behind.

Michael made a step forward, as though to stop her, and then halted.

It was all over!

PART IV.

However weak he may have shown himself while matters hung in the balance, Teissier was, above all, a man of action; and once his deterrent scruples were removed, and a decision come to, he became himself again. He grasped the new situation immediately. He had often thought over the various theoretical solutions of the problem of his life. There had been several. Now he saw one, and one only—namely, to carry out his and his wife's intentions, and use every possible means of expediting the necessary legal proceedings, trying at the same time to conceal, as long as possible, the real reason for the divorce. For him, personally, the most important thing of all was to disappear into obscurity, and thus keep the scandal within the narrowest possible limits, and, at the same time, leave him some slender remnant of self-respect. To disappear! and, at one blow, to give up all that had thitherto been the aim and object of his life, the profession that he loved, all his ambition, all his altruism; to descend from his pinnacle to the

common level, perhaps lower; to let loose the bloodhounds of hatred, jealousy, and ill-feeling, which were only held in check by personal respect for him. He had arrived at this portentous conclusion in a very few minutes, as if it were the inevitable corollary of the other; and Michael's heart swelled with pride—nay: with an almost complacent satisfaction—when he had made up his mind to sacrifice his life to his love remorselessly.

"Take it! Take it! Take all! Enough for me if I have got you!"

"At all events," he said to himself, "they can't accuse me of self-seeking or meanness. They may say I'm a fool; but they shan't be able to despise me. They will have to allow that what I am doing has a certain touch of grandeur in it. Who will dare to throw a stone at a man who gives up everything?"

His reasoning showed he was not quite as indifferent to public opinion as he fancied.

"But," he continued, "what can it matter what they say?"

He knew perfectly well it *did* matter, and he could rid himself of the idea only by thinking lovingly of Blanche, who was to be his at last! He thought of being with her, no matter where—on some island in the Mediterranean—on some

southern strand, bathed by sun and sea, or by the balmy Italian lakes, in that land made for happiness, through which he had, erstwhile, rushed as in a dream, feeling "How happy one might be here!" Far, far away, at an unmeasurable distance, people would go on fretting and fuming over Life: but they would be "the world forgetting, by the world forgot." People and things would have passed into oblivion. Here his imagination faltered, and a shadow drifted across the brightness of his forecast. In his dream of pleasure he seemed to hear, through time and space, the sighs of the loved ones he had forsaken. They sounded like a knell. It cost him an effort to shake off the thought; but he succeeded at last. What was done was done. Why go back on an irrevocable decision that was already as good as carried out?

Michael wrote to Blanche the same evening, after his last interview with Suzanne.—

"We have agreed to take a serious step, dear, which will solve the inextricable difficulty of which we have hitherto been the victims. Suzanne had got to see that some way out of our present impossible position would have to be devised. The separation she insisted on had failed in its purpose, for it did not separate us. I told her, or rather hinted at, what had taken place between you and

me to-day. She instantly saw that our love was over-mastering, and she, herself, suggested a divorce. I fancy she had been thinking of it for some time, ever since our stay at Annecy, where our life together was so irksome. Of course, it had often crossed my mind too; but I should never have been the first to suggest it, for I knew what a one-sided arrangement it would be. I think so still, although I have consented to it. You must not suppose I clutched at it like a sinking man at a straw. No. I pointed out fully to Suzanne all that such a step would entail on me, on the children, and on her. She had foreseen my objections, and overruled them all. I think she is right. The most serious were those respecting the children. I feel bitterly the cruel facts of the case; but living together is clearly out of the question for my wife and me. The bond between us is a purely artificial one which would rapidly become intolerable. A divorce will only legalize an already existing separation, which will become more bearable if made absolute.

"Before leaving the house,—which I shall do to-morrow night,—I shall have a final interview with Suzanne. We must come to an understanding respecting the terms of the suit, which will necessarily be a complicated one, for divorce is granted

only on certain grounds. We must devise some, and I trust your name need not appear. It is to the interests of all of us to avoid scandal as much as possible, and Suzanne is not so small-minded as to want to compromise you from petty spite or jealousy. We will try, therefore, to keep our secret to ourselves. I shall have to tell De Thornes, however, as he shares with me the leadership of our Party, and has a right to know why I give up. (I forgot to say that I am sending in my resignation as Deputy to-morrow.) If we manage to keep everything close, I shall go away for a time after the divorce has been granted, and ask you in marriage as soon as it has blown over; otherwise, we must get married immediately after the decree, and disappear together.

"I know you too well, dear, to have any misconception as to your feelings on reading this letter. I know they will be anything but pleasant. You will torture yourself with reproaches. You may spare yourself them, Blanche. If anyone is to be blamed, it is I, and I only for making you love me. But I can't help thinking we are not quite so guilty as we seem. We have greatly loved and greatly suffered. We were willing to make a bitter sacrifice, and are ready to do so still. But

it was too much to ask us to wipe out even memory from our hearts. You must bear in mind we yield only because the one person in the world who could release has released us. I know that the world (which would have been more indulgent had we been less loyal) will judge us harshly. But I continue to think that we are not wholly bad. That thought is all the more comforting just now, when (I will not hide it from you) my conscience is grievously troubled. Would you think any better of me if I were not sad and heartsore on the eve of leaving all my old ties, and dearest duties for ever?

"I will say nothing more. Now is not the time to talk of love. I dare not and cannot; and you would not that I should try.

"Good-bye, dear. Once more I say: Accept the inevitable. Do not write for a day or two. I should not be surprised if the Court demands an examination of my papers if once they got on the scent. As we are anxious to hurry things on, I shall know this in a couple of days. Good-bye.

MICHAEL."

It was late at night when Michael finished this letter. Next morning he sent it off early, gave orders to his servant to pack up his things, as

he was leaving home, and then went to see De Thornes.

He found De Thornes just starting for his morning gallop.

"You must give up your ride for to-day, my dear fellow," Michael said to him with the utmost coolness. "I want to have a talk with you now, at once."

De Thornes, whose views on exercise were those of the Medes and Persians, gave in with rather a bad grace, and took Teissier to his study.

"Well," he enquired, "what is it that's so pressing? Are we going to turn out the Ministry?"

"No," said Michael: "it's about something quite different, something personal to myself. I come to tell you a piece of news that will astonish you. I am going to be divorced."

De Thornes usually wore an impenetrable mask; but a surprised, almost scared, look came over his face.

"What do you say? It's not possible! it's not possible, Teissier? It will be the ruin of you!"

"I know it will," said Michael,—"at least, in the sense in which you use it. The news is true for all that, and you are the first I have told."

De Thornes paced up and down the room with his hands behind his back.

"And the reason?" he said suddenly.

"Need I enter into explanations, my good friend? I don't think it will be much use, for I doubt if you will understand. But, if anyone has a right to know, you have. There is a reason, and we shall have to find a plea. What it will be I shall leave to my lawyer. As to the reason, I should wish it to remain secret as long as possible. It is this: I want a divorce in order to marry a young girl with whom I am in love."

De Thornes threw up his hands and halted in front of Michael.

"You are mad!" he cried.

Michael looked at him, and went on calmly.

"No: I'm not mad, De Thornes; but I'm in love—yes: in love: nothing worse. I know it's unusual at my age and in my position; but so it is. Accidents of that sort occur sometimes in life, and have to be dealt with. For upwards of two years I have, unknown to anyone, struggled and fought against it, and resisted it in every way. I need not go into details—need I? You are a practical man, and it's the result that interests you most. Well, I have told you the result."

De Thornes thought for a moment, and like a man unused to give in.

"It might be arranged somehow," he began, reflectively.

"No," said Michael: "it can't be arranged. I can answer for that! You needn't be at the trouble to try. There's no way out of it. Questions like these are not so easily patched up as a split in the Ministry."

"Unhappy man! Think of your wife and children."

Michael's imperturbable coolness began to desert him a little.

"Yes," he said, in a low voice: "that's the terrible, terrible part! My wife is resigned, De Thornes. She sees it is necessary and inevitable, and, on the whole, more dignified. I had thought of it before she did, but should never have been the first to mention it. It was she who proposed it."

De Thornes shrugged his shoulders.

"It may be very grand," he said, contemptuously, "and very noble, perhaps; but it's ridiculous. Your wife ought to have considered your children before everything."

"You mustn't judge from appearances," said Michael, who had recovered his provokingly cool manner. "My conduct is not, perhaps, so infamous as you imagine. If we were psychologically in-

clined, we might enlarge on the subject. You may be certain that my wife thought of our children; but she had to think of herself too. And it's not impossible that she is giving me back my liberty because she lacks the virtues of indulgence and forbearance."

"Your ideas are too far-fetched for me, my dear fellow! Forgive me if I say I can't follow such subtle analyses. Had she taken your position into consideration,——"

Michael stopped him, with a touch of impatience in his manner.

"Now, my dear fellow, do you really think that consideration for my position would do what love for our children couldn't? My position! Do you suppose we either of us ever gave it a thought?"

"I don't know about her; but I can easily believe it of you. Had you thought of it, you would have seen that in a few months, perhaps days, you might be placed in office by popular acclamation; that you represent a great national movement; that thousands put their patriotic hopes in you; and that now, instead of leading your Party to victory, you are placing weapons in the hands of our adversaries. Can't you hear them saying, 'Teissier, the impeccable, the irreproachable, the Moral Regenerator of his country!'?"

"My friend, I have thought of every atom of it. But you seem to think I mean to go on with my political career; instead of which I am going to send in my resignation this very evening, as soon as I leave home for good."

De Thornes, who was sitting at his writing-table, made it shake as he brought his fist down on it.

"Good heavens!" he cried.

"Yes: this very evening," repeated Michael, firmly.

"Then you are even a greater fool than I took you for! Once your resignation is sent in, the mischief will be irreparable."

"It is already."

"Oh, dear, no! They would howl about it for a week, or perhaps a month at most,—and then it would blow over. In France those sort of things don't ruin a man. We're not like Englishmen!"

"That's just what Diel said."

"Well, and didn't he take on himself to show he was right?"

"Stay! What Diel said was this—the sentence has stuck in my memory—'In France we always overlook such things, particularly in habitual sinners in that line.' Now, I'm not an habitual sinner in that line, unfortunately: so I am not likely to be forgiven."

"How funny you are!"

"Not in the least, believe me. You are a man of the world, and know it is so. A respectable man is ruined by a first fault. Now, tell me, what would a cynic like Diel,—an easy-going, unconscientious libertine,—have done in my place? He would have simply indulged his passion, and never said a word about it."

"Since you know so well what other people would have done in your place, why didn't you do it?"

"Ah! there you are! Precisely because I haven't the necessary requirements;—I am not cynical, nor unconscientious, nor a libertine;—because, in fact, I am better than my actions; because I have a soul superior to my physical weakness."

Each word of Michael's increased De Thornes' surprise.

"What utter folly!" he exclaimed. "Now, will you listen to a little good sense?"

"Certainly. I wish to be perfectly reasonable."

"I suppose you think your reasonableness carries conviction! But let us argue the matter out."

"By all means."

"If I understand you, you wish to convey to me that you are better than you seem—better, say,

than the average of your contemporaries? I quite believe it. And what is the result? That what for others would merely be a slight mistake, you are turning into utter ruin: what for an ordinary man would be simply an accident is, to you, a catastrophe. Rather than consent to the compromises of weaker men, you compromise your whole Party, and commit moral suicide!"

"Just so!"

"And you expect me to admire you?"

"Not at all, my dear fellow: I never asked you to admire me."

"But you want me tamely to agree."

"Not that either. I want you to do nothing. I only give you due notice of what I intend doing, as we have interests in common, in order that you may take any steps you think advisable."

"What I think the most advisable step is to use every means at my disposal to keep you where you are."

"'Every means at your disposal'? What nonsense you are talking! You have none. I am free to do as I like."

"No: you are not free! Were it only a matter concerning you and yours,—well, after advising you as a friend, I should shrug my shoulders

and pass on. But too much depends on you. You are a public man, Teissier, which means a man no longer his own master. The future of your Party,—perchance, of your country,—is at stake. And you would sacrifice it all for a pretty girl!"

Michael held up his hand angrily.

"Be as angry as you please," cried De Thornes. "I prefer you like that. You told me just now you had a conscience. Then I appeal to it. It will tell you whether you are, as you say, your own master, and free to do as you like."

Teissier had recovered his self-possession.

"I know I'm doing wrong," he said, deliberately. "I know perfectly I have no right to act what I am doing. But I am assuming the right, even if I have it not, because, otherwise, I could not go on living!"

"You could not go on living!" repeated De Thornes; and he added, impatiently, "If you can't control your passion, then don't control it; but, if you mean to be wicked, choose the form of wickedness that will be least injurious to everyone concerned. If you can't restrain your love for this girl, whoever she is, some remedy less heroic might surely be found."

Michael's eyes flashed angrily.

"Take heed what you are saying," he growled.

Then, with his wonted coolness, he continued:

"No: what seems to you the less evil seems to me infinitely the greater. I told you you would not understand. You are everywhere the same matter-of-fact and practical person that you are in the Chamber. You judge everyone by his acts; I judge of people from themselves. It's true I am going to break up my home, injure my Party, and ruin my own life. It is hateful and horrible, and I'm a criminal. But I should be a far worse one if I listened to you; for I should sink to the level of Diel, whom you hold up as a pattern. What would become of Her? She doesn't count, with you, in comparison to what you call 'vested interests.' Do you know?—all the scandal and disaster that alarms you so much seems to me my only excuse? A poor excuse enough! It doesn't prevent me seeing I am wrong; but at least it saves me from despising myself."

"The world won't look at it in that light."

"No: I know I shall be judged far more harshly than if I had simply taken your advice. But what do I care, if I am less guilty in my own eyes? I don't enquire what people say who know only the bare facts, and judge me by them. It is sufficient for me if I, who understand my own

conscience best, can satisfy it. I have chosen the less evil course, and the one that will leave me the fewest regrets, with perhaps a bare possibility of happiness and of oblivion."

De Thornes had ceased to interrupt him. He looked at Michael as if he almost pitied him, and was thinking of something that surprised him a good deal.

"Ah!" he said, after a pause, "what a curse men are who have delicate and over-refined susceptibilities! Other men, with all their weaknesses and faults and vices, get through the world as best they can, with as little jolting and jarring as possible; and, in spite of everything, things move on step by step, and each generation is a wee bit better than the one before. It's only your superior beings who put a spoke in our wheel! You know the saying in the Bible, 'There is more joy in Heaven over one sinner that repenteth than over ninety and nine just persons.' And I greatly fear there is more sorrow for one 'just person' who sins than joy for a hundred sinners who repent. I wonder if you have the least idea of what the downfall of such a man as you entails? Have you reflected on the moral crash that it will involve?"

Michael tried to put on an air of indifference,

"It's my turn now," he said, "to borrow some of your matter-of-fact and practical arguments. Very few persons are necessary, and none is indispensable. Somebody will take my place. You, probably; and you will lead the Party with a little less dash, no doubt, but more cautiously and safely, which will be all the better, perhaps. And then the terrible moral crash that my downfall will occasion—what will it really amount to? Some articles in the newspapers for a few weeks; and then they will give up, for I shan't answer; and I hope that '*Order*' won't be so silly as to defend me. And it will all be forgotten, as if nothing of the sort had ever occurred. No one will ever give a thought to a man who, not having the pluck to do his duty, gave up the world to go and bury himself, far from Paris, in an out-of-the-way corner. It will be like the dropping of a stone into water, which makes a splash, some endless, ever-spreading circles, and—that's all! No, no, my friend: make your mind easy. The world will go on just the same whether I'm there or not."

"But what a surrender for you!"

"So you say. I give up what I have and what I may get—my ambition, and any good I might, perhaps, have done. Yes: I give it all up: I will

not say without regret, but, at any rate, knowingly, and with my eyes open, in order to retire into obscurity, and be happy—if I can."

"But you mayn't be."

"Anyhow, it won't be the same sort of unhappiness, which, believe me, is worth sacrificing something for. Yes: I haul down my colours and go. And when I am abused, my friend, pray don't be at the trouble of defending me!"

De Thornes began to despair.

"I must impress on you once more," he said, detaining Michael, who had risen, and was holding out his hand, "that the Party would not desert you, no matter what you did. You are its heart and soul, and it knows it, and would stand by you under any circumstances, however difficult. We should rally round you with all our energy, and shelter you. And, as, after all, Frenchmen are not like Scotch Puritans, you need not fear the fate of Parnell."

"Do you think I should consent to play such a part as his?" answered Michael, hotly. "I followed every incident of his struggle, I can tell you, and watched his fight and fall, with a fierce, personal interest! He only just missed being a great man; in any case, he was an honest one, or it would not have killed him. To my mind his resistance did

him no good, and the energy that he displayed in his futile struggle only disfigures the final pages of his history. No, no: I know perfectly well that when a man does what I am about to do he can only hope to preserve his dignity by retiring into silence and obscurity. The Party is welcome to throw me overboard, like Jonah, or to stand up for me: it must act entirely as is best for its own interests, without considering mine; I have none now. I have sat upon my own case, pronounced myself guilty, and sentenced myself to exile! So, good-bye!"

"Teissier, I implore you not to take any irrevocable step to-day! Wait for two days,—even for one,—and think it over."

"No, no: all my thinking is done, and it was not so pleasant that I should wish to go through it over again. Come, give me your hand, my good friend; forgive me the bother I am causing you; think kindly of me, and don't attach more importance to my retirement than it possesses. I am only a soldier who has been killed in the assault. You survivors must push on, ever on; and, if necessary, make stepping-stones of the bodies of your dead comrades; they will never feel the feet that trample them!"

At the very time that Michael was interviewing

De Thornes, Blanche Estève had driven to the Teissiers'.

"Is Mdme. Teissier at home?" she enquired of a servant whose face was new to her.

"Madame has given orders that she will see no one."

"Take my card to her, please. She will see me."

The servant hesitated.

"I must see your mistress," said Blanche.

He went, and, returning almost immediately showed her in.

Nervous already, Blanche was deeply moved at seeing again the little sitting-room which was associated in her mind with so many memories. It looked exactly as it used to. While waiting for Suzanne, she examined the familiar trifles that remained immutable and inert amid all the change around them.

Suzanne came before long, and was as calm as Michael with De Thornes—with the resolute calm of fixed determination. Blanche, who was standing, advanced towards her, and said, in a quivering voice,

"I have been told what took place here yesterday. I cannot, and will not, countenance the sacrifice you contemplate. I may be thoughtless and wicked; but I am not heartless and contempt-

ible. In your eyes, no doubt, my conduct has no excuse; in mine, it has just one—I was so unhappy. But I am going away from Paris,—far away,—and will never see him again. I refuse to be the destroyer of your hearth and home, and the ruin of his life."

Suzanne listened with unmoved countenance, and only a smile of sad resignation playing round her lips. She sat down, and motioned Blanche to do the same.

"My poor child!" she said, in a voice whose forced calm scarce hid the bitterness that was in her heart. "My poor child! And do you think that I should have given him up before, had I been able to keep him? Do you suppose that I cannot be selfish too? There is nothing noble in me, and we need not play at pretended generosity! You say you will not do this thing, as if you were still free to choose. You are so no longer. Everything has turned out just as it was certain to do. I accept the situation. Follow my example,—resist no longer,—but accept what Fate has sent you!"

"No! it would be unfair—cruelly unfair! You would have all the sorrow, while I, who have stolen what is yours, should have all the happiness!"

"Happiness! Are you quite sure of that? And I shall not be alone: I have my children. True, I shall be left a goodly legacy of regrets; but I fancy that you and he will not be altogether devoid of them either. And do you suppose that my share will be the worst?"

"You must see and know it is not possible! He could never endure the tortures of remorse!"

"I don't know whether he would suffer as you say; nor do I very much care, for, I must confess, my own sufferings have made me somewhat indifferent to his. You wish to rouse my sympathies for him; but you forget I no longer possess your youthful and romantic imagination, and am past the age of blind devotion. Once more, I say that in the whole business I am not considering him any more than I am you, but merely myself. I only know one thing—that the present state of affairs must end, and can end only as it is doing. Neither you nor he had strength of will enough to forget; and you never will now, or only when too late. Why should you wish me to keep him, knowing, as I do, that his heart would be elsewhere—and that he disliked me, and would gladly be rid of me?"

"O!" cried Blanche. "How could you ever think that such an idea——"

Suzanne interrupted her with a shrug.

"Why not? Allowing that he might not go quite so far as to wish for my death, still he would have it in his mind, and I should see he had. And, even apart from that, have you ever reflected on what our life together would be when distrust and dislike had alienated affection? No! There are situations that a wife cannot accept."

"But am I bound, either, to accept what you offer me at the cost of your happiness and a hideous scandal? If your self-respect obliges you to do it, mine compels me to refuse it."

"To refuse it? But you can't, my dear. It's yours—you took it. The present I make you is not a very grand one, and I require no gratitude from you for it. I simply say that, as you want it, you may keep it! At the beginning, no doubt, you never thought things would take this turn. I never supposed you were, either of you, any worse than you are: I never accused you of calculated villainy. You foolishly played with Love, without ever asking yourselves where it would end: you fancied you would always be able to stop when you chose: and, as usual, Love has brought you where we are. He has got hold of you, and you can't get away from him: you wouldn't even if you could. I understand it all now, and don't think

it is wholly your fault. Both you and he are better than you seem from the way you are acting."

Blanche listened, but did not quite grasp the full meaning of the outraged wife.

"How good you are!" she exclaimed, trying to take one of Suzanne's hands.

Suzanne drew it back.

"Let me finish, and don't waste your admiration on me. I could almost pity you: you are so totally unaware of what you are doing, and what is in store for you. Were you capable of understanding me, you would know that I forgive you, because you will never forgive yourselves. My pardon is my revenge!"

Blanche gazed at her with frightened eyes as, rising, Suzanne ended by saying,—

"Don't let us prolong this interview. It would be both useless and painful. Good-bye. You know your way out."

And she walked out of the room first, like a stranger, in her own house.

Suzanne and Michael passed each other on the stairs a moment later. Their faces were set and hard as they bowed coldly to each other.

Michael spent some hours in his study putting his papers in order. He burnt the bulk of them,

only keeping a very few that were indispensable.

Among his business letters he found a few unimportant notes from Blanche: he destroyed these, too, after reading them over. The flames danced merrily over their feast on what had thitherto constituted his life; and when he looked at the little bundle of letters and papers which contained all he had kept he could not help murmuring,—

"How small it seems!"

At his large writing-table, recently so littered now so bare, he wrote with steady pen his resignation as Deputy, and then some other short business notes. When all was done, he still sat on, dreaming in his chair, gazing for the last time at the familiar objects round him, and dwelling on the crowd of memories they awakened in his mind. He asked himself,

"Can it be true?"

And got his answer:

"Indeed it is!"

At last he rose from his chair, and rousing himself, rang for his servant.

"Is my portmanteau packed?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then order the carriage, please."

Just as he was leaving he met Peyraud on the stairs, coming up, as often happened, unannounced.

Informed by De Thornes of the state of the case, the worthy journalist had come to pick up any news he could, animated rather by psychological curiosity than by professional discretion.

With a gesture of impatience, Michael went back with him, and asked him to sit down.

"What have you come about, my dear fellow?" he asked.

Peyraud had his answer ready.

"I came to ask," he said, "what attitude you wish '*Order*' to take respecting the fresh strike at Anzin."

"Is there a strike at Anzin?" said Michael. "I was not aware of it. I have not read to-day's papers yet."

As Peyraud looked at him surprised, he added,—

"There is another matter, which will, I fear, cause you more trouble than that, although it is entirely a personal one. I am resigning my seat in the Chamber."

Peyraud opened his mouth to speak; but Teissier stopped him, and went on in an icy tone that forbade any questions.

"You are surprised? It's true, nevertheless. My letter is written and going to be sent. I shall

give up the Editorship of '*Order*.' I have summoned a meeting of the Board for to-morrow. I don't know who will be my successor; but I presume (and shall myself recommend) that you should be given the post of Editor."

Peyraud thanked him.

"I am not anxious about the future of the paper," he went on "any more than I am about that of the Party. It will not be difficult to find a better man."

Peyraud shook his head.

"Yes: a better man, I say." His voice shook a little. "You will say so yourself before very long."

He rose, so as to end the conversation; but Peyraud had hardly left the room before Monseigneur Russel was announced.

"Please tell Monseigneur," replied Michael, "that I will call and see him this evening or to-morrow morning."

Putting his papers into a parcel, which he tucked under his arm, he went downstairs.

He entered the little sitting-room, where, he knew, Suzanne would be waiting for him. She was seated with her hands before her at her work-table, with Annie on her right and Laurel on her left. It was such a charming picture of domestic peace that a sob of emotion rose in Michael's

throat. He repressed it by a violent effort of will.

"I am going now," he said.

He had to make his voice harsh in order to steady it.

Suzanne answered, without looking up,—

"Have you got everything you want?"

"Yes: thanks."

He hesitated.

"I want to say a few words to you," he said at length. "The children can stay: they won't understand. I suppose you agree with me that the real reason for my—journey—ought to be kept absolutely secret?"

Suzanne thought for a moment.

"Yes," she said.

"Then that's settled. Good-bye, children. Good-bye, Annie! Good-bye, little Laurel!" and he kissed them.

"We didn't know you were going away, father," said Laurel. "When are you coming back?"

"I don't know."

"Are you going far away?"

"Yes: I am."

"To Russia?"

"No: not to Russia: somewhere else."

"And when you come back will you bring us something very pretty?"

"Yes, my darlings: I will bring you something very pretty."

Little Annie coaxingly kept hold of his hand. He took it from her gently; and, turning to Suzanne, who was looking absently straight before her,

"Good-bye, dear," he said; and his voice shook.

He took her hand and kissed her brow. He felt her wince, and the sob he was doing his utmost to keep down almost choked him. A big tear rolled down his cheek; but he managed to preserve his self-control.

Just then something passing attracted the children's attention. They ran to the window, laughing, and calling out,

"Good-bye, father! Good-bye!"

He went.

Suzanne was standing dumb and motionless by the little table, when, all of a sudden, she sank down in a flood of tears.

Annie and Laurel ran to her.

"Mother! mother! what's the matter with you? Are you crying because father has gone away? But he'll come back again!"

She clasped them to her.

"No, my darlings," she said through her tears: "father will never come back. Never! never!"

Then, without knowing what for, the little things began to cry too.

Michael did not hear them. He walked out of the house without looking back.

"What station am I to drive you to, sir?" enquired the coachman.

"To the Grand Hotel," he said; and threw himself back in the carriage.

Next day, Teissier's resignation was the talk of the town. The reporters, who were put on his track, ran him to ground in the Grand Hotel. They had each had a different theory to air; but only one journal, the supposed organ of Diel, got anywhere near the truth. It professed to detect a curious coincidence between Teissier's retirement and the breaking-off of Gaval's marriage.

"In any case," said the writer, "we must wait and see. The truth is sure to leak out, and we shall be put in full possession of the facts of the case. Our darkness will then be made light. The life of a man like Teissier is public property. He is of such eminence as to make concealment out of the question; and the parade of virtue, to which he owed so much of his power, gives all of us the right to unmask his secret."

The following Sunday Mondet, who had read the papers and guessed the state of affairs, arrived

from Lyons and drove straight from the station to the house in the Rue St. Georges. He had some difficulty in getting in: the servants had received orders to admit no one.

"M. Teissier is away from home, and Madame will see no one."

"Take up my card to her, please. She will see me."

As the servant still declined, he added,—

"I tell you, she expects me."

Suzanne did not expect him, but was not surprised to see him; and looked really glad when he walked into the little sitting-room. As he entered, she recalled with painful clearness the evening they had spent there together: that time—how long ago it seemed!—when a cruel accident revealed Michael's secret to her. The scene flashed across her brain like lightning, and she closed her eyes involuntarily. Drawn closer by a common sorrow, they kissed each other. As Suzanne began to cry gently, Mondet asked her:

"Is it true that he's gone?"

She nodded affirmatively.

"With——?"

She shook her head.

"Then——?"

"I will tell you all."

Then—pausing—hesitating—stopping from time to time, she told her sorrowful tale,—half-ashamed to expose her wounded heart, half-glad to ease it by pouring out her woes to a sympathizing friend who had been hard hit in his faith and trust too.

Listening to her, Mondet gradually realized what a total wreck his old friend had made of a grand career; and he kept on repeating,—

"It's incredible! quite incredible!"

"It's true, nevertheless," said Suzanne; "and I am only now beginning to grasp the full extent of it. He has given up everything: it's all gone by the board! It's utter shipwreck for him and all of us. And who and what has he done it for? Can you understand it all?"

Mondet shook his head disapprovingly, in his old way, just as he used to when Michael made him the recipient of his confidences in the summer.

"And how about the children?" he asked.

"He kissed them before leaving as coolly as if he were only going away for a day or two."

"Poor little souls!"

He paced the little room to and fro, and thought it over and over, in vain.

"Is there nothing to be done?"

Suzanne shrugged her shoulders.

"What can there be?"

"To fetch him back."

She made a quick sign of dissent.

"Why not?" insisted Mondet. "He has taken no irrevocable step."

"He left because I wished it. It was I who first suggested divorce. He didn't want it, for he saw all the terrible consequences. He gave in only because he saw I was quite determined."

"And you regret it now?"

"I regret nothing."

"Don't say that! You yielded to passion."

"Passion? O, no: I leave that to him."

"Anger, then. But, now that you see your home empty, your children fatherless, the public Press hounding him down, his career cut short, the future closed to him, you must surely feel anything was better than such a break-up? And he sees it, too, no doubt."

"He sees it too, perhaps. He is clever enough to see anything. But he has ceased to be master of his own action; he is blind, and cannot perceive the road that lies before him. Ah! don't let us be too hard on him! He did his best. I could see how he fought against it. But he was beaten —and there's an end of it. You could have done nothing. He went away, leaving us in tears. I

was crying, and so were the children. But he wouldn't allow himself to hear!"

"Where is he now?"

"At the Grand Hotel."

"Well, I'll go and see him, and say all a friend can say. If he has a vestige of good sense or self-control left, I will bring him back to you."

Suzanne hesitated a moment; but, swallowing her pride,

"You can go," she said; "but I have no hope."

At the Grand Hotel, Mondet thought he would never get at Michael. His order to admit nobody was apparently inflexible, and he was sent from pillar to post. He began to despair, when suddenly he caught sight of, and was seen by, his friend, who rushed up to him.

"Ah, you dear, good soul! You, at all events, have not forsaken me! Come along, and let's have a talk!"

He took him into the little apartment, consisting of bedroom and sitting-room, that he occupied on the second floor. It was bare and comfortless. There was not a letter or a book about: only a few newspapers. There was no sign of his wonted energy and occupation.

"Poor wretch!" exclaimed Mondet. "What is this I hear you are doing?"

"Are you, too, going to throw stones at me, like the rest of them?" answered Michael, adding, as he crumpled up some newspapers lying on the table,—

"The papers are rending me piecemeal!"

"I don't agree with them: certainly not," said Mondet,—"I pity you quite as much as I blame you. I almost think I pity you most. Yes, indeed, I do, for your folly won't even gain its object. A man like you couldn't be happy under such conditions. You have destroyed your life for nothing—absolutely nothing. Now, listen to me. Nothing has occurred as yet that cannot be set right. Come along home, and the scandal will blow over."

"Indeed, it won't!" laughed Michael, ironically "Even if I would, you know very well I couldn't. Go back home? Why, my wife would go away then."

"No, my friend: she wouldn't. I have just been with her. She told me all about your separation. She sees now what she ought to have seen at first. She will forgive you and take you back; and you can take up your life again where you laid it down."

"Have you come all the way from Annecy to tell me that?" said Michael, interrupting him.

Mondet looked disconcerted, and Teisseir continued:

"You're quite right. I could take up my life again where I laid it down—just as I could have gone on with it, had I so wished. But that's exactly what I don't want. I held out to the very last, and it was Suzanne who finally broke me down. So much the worse for her! We should only have to go through it all over again.

What's done is done. It's just like my luck!"

"What do you mean by 'luck'? When a man has such duties as you have, he has no business to talk of luck."

Michael began to lose his temper.

"Duties, my dear fellow?" he said, angrily. "Don't let's talk of them. I have none. I have got rid of them. I've something else to think of, now. You go on as if I had plenty of time and temper to argue with you. If you wish to remain a friend of mine, Mondet, you must leave off. Don't let's talk any more about it; but come along and have some breakfast with me."

As he opened the door to show Mondet out, a waiter handed him De Thornes' card and Monseigneur Russel's.

"I told you I would see nobody," he said—; and, taking Mondet's arm, he added, savagely,—

"I can't be bothered with them any more!"

IX.

Suzanne to Mondet:

"Thanks, best of friends, for your affectionate letter. You have guessed the truth. Through all this business, which has made my life a perfect martyrdom, I have felt a terrible loneliness; and I yearn—how I yearn!—for friendly help and advice. I want to open my heart, and confide my sorrow to someone who will understand and feel with me. The cold indifference of everyone round me is a terrible aggravation of my suffering. Out of all the numbers of people for whom I kept open house, there are scarcely any who think it incumbent on them to offer me even the most commonplace expression of sympathy. Monseigneur Russel has been once or twice; and Mdme. De Thornes, and a few others, with long faces, embarrassed, not knowing what to say; avoiding the only subject I care to talk of, and walking on tiptoe, as if there was a corpse in the house. You know, I have hardly any real friends—women seldom have. What with their husbands, their children, and their social duties, there is very little time left for friendship. I have nothing now but my children, and the little things scarcely suffice for me. And yet they are the source of my

greatest joy and comfort. I know all their little thoughts, and they are so dependent on me. Do you know? I think children are far better than we are. They have a good-feeling, a delicacy, and tenderness, quite astonishing and refreshing in such young things. Annie and Laurel are delicious. Laurel, with her simple, thoughtless, natural high spirits, is a most cheerful little companion; while Annie has the softest and warmest of hearts, and a deep, loyal, affectionate nature, which shows itself in many pretty ways. As you know, she was her father's pet; and she does not forget it. The other evening—(I always go up to tuck them into bed last thing at night)—I found her crying. I kissed her, and asked her several times what the matter was; but she only answered,—

"'Nothing, mother! nothing!'

"At last she threw her arms round my neck, sobbing, and said, 'I am crying, mother, because I am thinking of father.'

"I caressed her, and had to hurry away for fear of breaking down. The dear wee things are touching beyond all expression; and I constantly ask myself what their future will be, now that they have only me to look to. When I think of it, I am filled with remorse, and am haunted by the idea that I have failed in my duty towards them.

I ought to have sacrificed myself, and put up with anything rather than imperil their happiness. I thought too much of myself, and too little of them. But it's too late now!

"But it's not only on their account I sometimes regret my decision. If you knew how hateful a divorce suit is, with its torturing details and petty humiliations, added to the shame and anguish of being left! And then the horror of having to let utter strangers—lawyers, magistrates, judges, and so on—into the holy of holies of one's life, to desecrate its privacy, and tarnish its most precious associations! I have had no end of trouble to get my lawyer, who has a special experience in these matters, to understand the exact situation. His point of view was this: 'I have to obtain for you every possible concession that it is in the power of the law to grant'; meaning thereby the custody of the children and a handsome allowance. He could not be made to see that these two questions were settled already. I don't require any allowance, as the legacy I inherited four years ago from my aunt is amply sufficient for all my wants; and Michael has not the smallest intention of claiming the children, whom he has sacrificed along with me to his blind passion. I tell him no decree of the Court can interfere with this

agreement which we have come to between ourselves. He wants to win something from the other side. He looks upon a lawsuit as a sort of duel. Our opponent must be wounded, and, if possible, killed. I can't get him to take any other view. He is extremely sharp, into the bargain; and has done his very best to find out what Michael's secret is. He very nearly succeeded, having been put on the scent by that odious article you know of—the only one that was anywhere near the truth. I had the greatest possible difficulty in avoiding the traps he laid for me. Why does the man want to know more than I choose to tell him? But he asks nothing better than to advertise himself by publishing the whole scandal, and trampling on the eminent politician who has fallen so low. But this he shan't do!

"What a heart-breaking farce it all is! What a meaningless farrago the whole false and make-believe mode of procedure is! You know, doubtless, that a divorce can only be granted on certain pleas. Now, it seems that we have no valid one—not in the eyes of the law, I mean: so we have had to trump one up. The simplest was what are called 'insulting letters and conjugal desertion.' And—would you believe it, dear friend?—he has had to write me some 'insulting letters'? He

mayn't have meant one word of them; but they stabbed me to the heart. Had it been I who had to do it, the pen would have dropped from my fingers first! I should never have submitted to play such a hateful part, and should have died sooner than allowed the memory of our past to be befouled. Fancy! Those letters will be read out in court; and, after undergoing the indignity of receiving them, I shall have to submit to the disgrace of hearing them read out by a lawyer, who will lay stress on their insolence, to a judge, who will weigh every vile word in them before deciding if they are insulting enough! I ask you: Which is the crueller—the law that demands such hypocrisy, or the man that complies with it? If he had even sent me a line, in private, to ask me to forgive him for the odious part he was being made to play! But he took good care not to! I verily believe he distrusts me, and is afraid to send me one word to contradict the contents of those he has written for the requirements of the case, lest I should produce it in court, and retard or jeopardize the decree that he desires, that he longs for, and is hurrying on, by bringing all the interest he can command into play. But he needn't be afraid. I have no wish to go back on the past; our position with regard to each other is irrecon-

cilable already; and we are just as much divorced now as we shall be when the decree is pronounced, and we have complied with all the hateful legal fictions.

"The worst, the most hypocritical, the most barbarous, the most cruelly futile of all these fictions is what they call the 'reconciliation.' We have had to go through it. It is indispensable: the law spares one nothing. We were both summoned to the judge's on the day appointed for this special ceremony. The waiting-room was full of ill-assorted couples, in every aspect and attitude of contempt, or of dislike, or of indifference for one another. Judging by the number, it can't be usually a very long business: much like a civil marriage, in that respect. Two or three stock questions are asked, the answers scarcely listened to; and it's all over. It was a longer affair with us, for we were smarter people. The judge played his part with considerable impressiveness. He went through the whole farcical business. He invited us to sit down, as if we were paying him a visit. He was amiable, polite, smiling, conciliatory, and witty, in turn. It must have lasted twenty minutes at least, during the whole of which time he poured forth a stream of honied accents. We listened to him, patiently, without looking at each other. He

became quite intoxicated on his own eloquence, and fancied it was so persuasive and irresistible that he finally exclaimed,—

"'There! it's all settled—isn't it? There is to be no divorce—is there?'

"As I was the plaintiff, he naturally addressed his remarks to me, and I had to answer him. I was so agitated I could hardly speak, and didn't know what I was saying. Anyhow, he gathered that he was wasting his eloquence, and murmured, regretfully,—

"'What a pity! What a pity!'

"At last he let us go.

"'I have done my duty,' he said, rising from his seat, and bowing us out, plaintively.

"As we were crossing the entrance-hall Michael came close up to me, and whispered,—

"'Forgive me!'

"I made no answer. I knew he meant me to understand that he wanted my forgiveness for all the lies and mummery of the wretched farce—for that, and that alone. I had not seen him since he came to explain to me at full length 'the steps to be taken in order to hurry things on,' as he said. I shall probably not see him again now before I do so in court.

"When it is over,—and will it ever be over?

It is like the lingering agony of a death that will not come. Even to the last one clings to hope. Folly! Hope of what? I know that nothing can undo the mischief now. The worst that could happen would be to fail in getting a divorce;—when it is over, I say, I shall leave Paris, and go and pay you a little visit at Annecy before settling down to my new life. Only with you, in all the world, am I sure to find sympathy and hearty friendship.

"Farewell, dear friend! Write to me sometimes.

"I send my love to everyone. What happy folks you are!

SUZANNE TEISSIER."

Michael to Mondet:

"Wherefore, dear friend, do you cover me with reproaches which no one knows better than you, are absolutely unavailing? What is done is done; and, even if we wished to, we could not retrace our steps. For my part, I may add that nothing would induce me to do so, notwithstanding the horrors we shall have to go through to gain our object.

"Supposing, for an instant—what is not the case—that I were not still, as I once was, the victim

of a blind and overmastering passion, which has become all the more irresistible now that the last restraining influences have been surrendered by her who alone might have exerted them—do you think that people, with any delicacy of feeling, could possibly take up again a life in common, at the same place where it was broken off, after such a rupture as ours, and after the incidents attendant on a lawsuit that has been going on now for upwards of two months? The lawsuit is far more injurious and final in its effects, I can assure you, than the decree that it is intended to obtain. It has demolished every trace of the past, dragged every memory through the mire, and degraded one's very soul! And when I think that I was, once, the champion of social law and order! Truly, they are noble objects of admiration, and worth devoting one's life to uphold! I never before saw the inner working of the judicial machine which is supposed to regulate our moral conduct. But, now that I have handled it, I know how filthy it is, and how much imposture, lying, hypocrisy, and cruelty, can exist under cover of such an institution. Our Divorce laws, which I formerly opposed, are, I can see now, only the logical corollary of the Marriage laws that obtain under the present order of things. The one is just as

vicious as the other. You cannot imagine to what a level they degrade one, the humiliations they inflict, and the grotesque and indecent farce they force one to take part in. Unless the jurists who framed them were unmarried men, they are quite inexcusable: they can have known nothing about their trade. No divorce can be obtained except on facts. But why facts? We had none to produce: so we manufactured them; and I had to write 'insulting letters,' that made me quiver with shame and indignation, composed for me by my lawyer, who threw himself into the business with the utmost gusto and alacrity. It is lucky that the law recognizes this comparatively simple fiction: otherwise, I should have had to beat my wife in the presence of witnesses, or connived at the trumping-up of still viler evidence. These, and such as these, are the admirable methods by which the Law protects the sanctity of Marriage while permitting its dissolubility. Facts it must have; and it gets them. But at what a price! I should have imagined that a situation like ours was a thousand times more convincing than all the facts in the world. Shouldn't you? Surely my present state of mind divorces me from my wife far more completely than any mere moral or physical ill-treatment? And yet my wife must

produce evidence of either, or of both, before she has a valid claim to the relief of the Law. Should I ever return to public life——but I never shall!

"Of course, my accursed notoriety complicates the situation. It avails nothing that I have ceased to be anything but a private person, and the last man in France likely to become a Cabinet Minister now. It will take months to accustom them to treat me like any other Tom, or Dick, or Harry. Lawyers, barristers, and judges, all look on me as a rare specimen, and think it incumbent on them to subject me to every refinement of torture. The scene at the Court of 'reconciliation' was extraordinary. How comes it that human beings know so little of one another?

"I confess the incident moved me extremely. Suzanne looked pale and pinched, aged, and indescribably sad. We avoided looking at one another; but I felt that her eyes and her heart were filled with proud reproaches. What cruel injury I have inflicted on the poor thing, although never for a moment ceasing to have a true and deep affection for her! All the dear memories of our life floated through my mind while the judge eloquently poured forth his moral dictums. To think that those days are gone, never to return!—

that they must be, henceforward, as though they had never been!

"Then, see the unfairness of our respective lots in life. I, who am at the bottom of all the mischief, ride off into a smiling future, which promises me the happiness I long for, if so be my conscience will let me enjoy it; she, whose portion has been naught but suffering, is left forsaken and alone, and with nothing to look forward to.

"True, she has her children. Her children! I think of them constantly, especially of little Annie, who was my pet; for I thought I saw, in her deep and sensitive nature, an infinite capacity for suffering. She loved me too, and used to play so prettily with my beard while telling me all the little stories she could remember. Does she notice my absence I wonder? Does she ever ask for news of 'father'? I know not. But, after the divorce has been granted, I will take steps to see them from time to time. Yet I wonder whether it would not be better to leave it alone, and let them suppose I am dead? No one would ever mention my name to them, and gradually I should become one among the many vague memories of their childhood. Otherwise, what would they think were they to see their mother living alone, and their father with another wife? What injury I am doing to them,

too! More even than I thought for. Mine is a strange fate! I don't think any man ever started with more fixed or higher ideals of Right; yet few men have inflicted greater suffering on themselves, or those they care for, than I shall have done. I often think that the ruthless destruction of so much that I cherished can come to no good. How can happiness be won by causing such misery? It is not possible—is it? It surely will be poisoned and blighted? And I haven't the heart to accept happiness at such a price.

"I am still at the Grand Hotel, where I have been living for the last two months, amid a perpetual coming and going. It's easier to hide, and be to oneself, in such places. I spend my time in a sort of busy idleness that does not suit me at all I never see Blanche; nor do we write to each other. We are most cautious. We take every precaution to avoid her name being mentioned in the suit—not for my sake, who have nothing, now, to lose, but for hers, who would feel acutely being thrust into notoriety. We shall do all we can to spare her sensitiveness, which is at once admirable and proper. Shall we succeed? I hope we shall, in spite of that infamous article that you saw, and in which I detected the diabolical intentions and ill-feeling of Diel. It had to be passed over in silence,

as any reference to it would have only aggravated the mischief.

"I fancy that two months will about see us through, now. It seems that four months at least are required for a divorce suit, and I have had to set all my old friends on to use their influence, in order that that limit of time may not be exceeded. Fortunately, they have aided me in every possible way: not because I am myself,—for they all know I am nobody any longer—but because it is to the interest of all concerned to get it over, —to my Party's who wish to be rid of me as quickly as possible; and to my opponents, who want to make sure I don't escape from their clutches. Everything, therefore, is being hurried on. How I pity those wretched people who go through months and months of this torture, and eat their hearts out, watching the slow progress of the wheel on which they are being broken! Of course, they have not the additional bitterness of seeing their misery made public property. Good heavens! How I want to vanish into obscurity, and go away with Her somewhere—where my very name has not been heard of, and among people speaking an unknown tongue, so that we may be forgotten and we may forget!

"Good-bye, dear friend. Go on loving me, and

don't scold me any more. You are lucky to have 'no history,' and to live in a country that you, love, among those that love you, and to whom you have never done an ill turn in your life.

M. TEISSIER."

Suzanne to Mondet:

"A few days more, and all will be over! Will you believe me, dear friend, when I tell you that I long for the final blow to fall with almost as much impatience as sorrow? I am sometimes in despair when I remember that as soon as the sentence is passed by the judge a chasm will be open between me and the dear past, with its happy memories of the love of my life, the love that had grown into steady affection, and was, I had hoped, to comfort me in my old age, until the end came. On the other hand, I cannot go on bearing much longer the weary waiting and distress of mind, the feverish anxiety caused, and aggravated by the painful interviews with my lawyer, and, above all, the dread of the day when I shall have to appear before the Court, like a malefactor—the slow and gruesome preliminaries are enough to drive one mad! I long so to get away from Paris with my poor little orphans! They know nothing, of

course, and are bright and playful. It is four months since they have seen their father, and they have forgotten him already. Just at first, Annie used to speak of him sometimes, and ask whether he were coming back, and when. Now she scarce ever does so, and seems not to care. I am not sure whether Laurel would know him if she saw him. How nice it would be to remain a child all one's life, and be able to forget so easily! I wonder whether Michael will ever want to see them again? I fancy not. They would only be a reproach to him, and disturb his new-found happiness. And what could he say to them? For, of course, as they grow up, and begin to understand things, they will form their own opinion, and think, 'Father deserted us.' Poor darlings! they don't know yet what it means to be fatherless, and what dangers it adds to life, from which they have only me to protect them. I tremble when I think of the duties that will devolve on me, with no one to help me. Their whole education, with the cares and responsibilities of forming their characters, will be on my poor shoulders; and I dread it. Don't you agree with me that the moral example shown by the parents has an immense influence on the lives and characters of the children? Good breeds good, evil breeds evil, by

a mysterious and immutable law. This notion haunts me at times, and I ask myself what sort of influence their father's conduct will have on them. If we are really governed by this inexorable law, they have the seeds of evil implanted in them already, to bear fruit in due course. I have sometimes a sort of presentiment about their futures. Annie especially makes me anxious, from her habitual melancholy, which, in a child of nine, is both abnormal and alarming. She seldom plays or talks, and seems always to be thinking and dreaming. She is very good, almost too passively and mechanically so. I often think it is like the unnatural calm that precedes a storm. Her large, dark eyes tell one nothing yet; but they produce and suggest such intense sadness that one wonders what their tears will flow for. Sweet bairnies, I can wish them nothing better in their lives than happiness such as I enjoyed for twelve short years, —peaceful, healthy, calm, trustful happiness, unclouded by vain regret or restless longing. Many poor creatures never know what real happiness is, in this unfairest of worlds. It looks as if life ought to be so full up, after twelve years of joy, peace, and love, that what is left must be too short to contain a fair share of sorrow. But it is not so! The waking is all the bitterer that the sleep has

been so sweet. Past years count for nothing. They are gone, never to return; and that is all I care to know. I endure the present. I dread the future. It is pregnant with sorrow and loneliness and weariness. Woman was not made to live alone, and I dread my solitude.

"You see, dear friend, how many thoughts and anxieties oppress me on the eve of the fatal day. I must tell somebody, and only to you can I fully open my heart. As soon as the decree is pronounced, remember it is settled I go to Annecy with the children. I shall stay there for some weeks; and after that everything is vague.

SUZANNE T."

Mondet to Michael:

"There is still time to draw back, my dear friend; and I make a last and final appeal to you. I enclose herewith a letter which I have just received from your wife. There is no fine writing, or boo-hooing, or dramatic despair, in it; but it shows such genuine maternal anxiety and profound grief, and takes such a just view of the case, that if you are not completely dead to all right feeling you can't help being touched by it. For months past you have, evidently, been living in a

dream, blundering along, like a blind man, or else hypnotized, and under the spell of some outside influence that is leading you to perdition. There is still time to throw it off, and save you and yours. You have sacrificed enough already to your fatal passion. For Heaven's sake, try to master it before it is too late! In the enclosed letter is a passage, relating to your girls, which struck me particularly. Have you ever reflected that the burden of your sin will hang like a dead weight on them all their lives long, and perhaps longer? Their mother, with a woman's prophetic instinct of danger, feels it. She foresees that the better of the two, sweet little Annie, whom you used to love so dearly (no doubt because she was as like you as your shadow), is in most danger. Her future is in your hands, and you are answerable for it.

"You mustn't think that I have been asked to write to you. It is entirely on my own responsibility, and for the sake of our former friendship. I cannot suppose that anything I might say will influence you. Whatever hope I have lies in the fact that I know you are not bad at heart, not so case-hardened in sin, but that a few words from a friend like me might wake you from your bad dream. Would that my letter might arouse your

conscience! I know you have one. You have sent it to sleep. The time comes when it will reassert itself; and it will be too late if you persist in your present course.

"It will be no news to you to hear that in these parts, where you were looked on as a hero and a demi-god, your doings are a good deal canvassed. No one presumes to excuse you: not even I, who am alone in saying a good word for you. You are universally blamed, and the reprobation of the public is all the more severe that you held so lofty a place in their esteem. Do you really think you are right, and the whole of the rest of the world wrong? But I should be giving you an erroneous impression if I told you that their feeling against you was implacable. Not so. They like you, although they blame you, and would very soon learn to forgive you. Yes: these indifferent outsiders, who had put all their hope in you, and now are fain to defend for themselves the cause that you defame, would rejoice over the repentant sinner as heartily as those of your own home and hearth.

"There, now: I have told you what I wished you should know, lest obstinacy and despair are, as well as passion, urging you on. Should this be so, all is not yet lost. The voices of both good sense and

duty may work a saving miracle. If you need encouragement, support, sympathy, you have only to lift your finger, and I will come to you.

"I disapprove of you just as much as everyone else; but I love you more, and you can count on me.

"Your old friend,

JACQUES MONDET."

Blanche to Michael:

"While it is still time, Michael, I implore you to retrace your steps. I don't wish for happiness purchased by such tears. Ah! had I only foreseen the horrors of what we are doing! But at one time I saw nothing: and the result is that public curiosity is now battening on the sacred privacy of you and yours. I read the newspapers; and each day, dear Michael, is a fresh martyrdom! Their abusive articles about you will kill me, or make me go mad!

"You know well that it is not for myself that I feel as I do. What can it matter to me, when I remember that, after all the shame, and humiliation, and pain, and struggle, is over and done with, you and I shall go off together to some far country, where no one knows anything about us or our

affairs? But we are destroying the lives of others!

"I wanted to tell you I have had a letter from Mondet that has cut me to the heart. He writes about Suzanne and your girls; and asks me if I have no pity for her who was once more than a mother to me, or for her children, whom I called my 'little sisters.' 'It is for you,' he writes, 'and for you only, to point out his duty to Michael. You must use the power you have over him to lead him back into the path of right, out of which there can be no happiness.' His letter is long and cruelly unjust; but, no doubt, he is right even when he is cruellest; and if *he* blames me,—he who has loved me from my youth up, and my father before me,—what must others think? But, anyhow, he had no business to write me such a harsh letter while asking me to make you do your duty while there is still time.

"I pity Suzanne, and I pity her children; but I pity you, dear, most of all. You will never be happy. Remorse will come between us and poison our lives. I confess that the thought of losing you is terrible; but how much worse it would be to be yours, and yet fail to make you happy; to feel and know that you regarded me as one of your blunders, and to read in your face the regret

self-reproach, and secret sorrow that you could not confide to me! I must not lure you to your destruction. All that I ask is, that my memory be kept green in your heart, and that, when you think of me it may be as of a something you longed for, and could not have—a sweet, vague tender, unattainable desire.

"And now, Michael, I must disappear for ever out of your life. Write and tell me I am right. that you will do your duty, and leave me to forget you. Forgetfulness will come, or, at least, resignation. I should, I think, be reconciled and almost glad to know that you were back once more at your own fireside, and at peace.

"Write me a last farewell, and never let us meet again! Good-bye, dear: good-bye!

"I am yours, yours for ever!

BLANCHE."

Suzanne to Mondet:

"DEAR FRIEND,—

"It is all over, and I have nothing to keep me here now; so you may expect me almost as soon as this letter—a wreck after all the emotions of this last terrible day. I might well dread it! But all my anticipations fell far short of the reality—of the agony, humiliation, and

despair, that I underwent in those few hours, while my fate was being decided by cold, stern men, who plucked out my heart, and held it up to public view in their set formulas! I felt as if I were falling through space, as in a nightmare. It required all my strength and self-control and dignity to enable me to bear up and repress my grief and my sobs. They rose in my throat and choked me, and well nigh forced their way out. But, instead of giving way to my feelings, I had to reply to the questions of the judge and his officials calmly and clearly. Ah! those questions! I cannot imagine how I had the wretched courage to go through with them, and answer, and not die! I shall never be the same again! Something in me has been done to death by that closing scene. I have drunk too deeply of the cup of shame: the taste of it will poison my lips for ever. He, used as he is to such things, bore it admirably. He replied slowly, and in a clear voice, as if he knew what he wanted to say, and could say it. He looked at me once or twice in the coolest way. He is a perfect actor, I can assure you. I always knew he was clever, but had no idea how clever till now. But he, too, had a bad time of it. My lawyer, without saying a word to me, all at once made a pointed allusion to 'a romance that, by

common consent of all the parties concerned, had been kept in the background, but which was well known to involve the defendant and a lady who should be nameless.' He hinted, vaguely and mysteriously, that the 'reason for the present unfortunate lawsuit was to be looked for in that quarter, and that the future would, doubtless prove the correctness of his inference.' Michael grew pale with rage, and I thought for a moment he would strike the lawyer. The innuendo made a tremendous sensation in court. What affected me personally was that until then he had remained absolutely callous. He had withstood all the home truths they had hurled at his head about his forsaken children, his neglected duties, his shameful future, and his forfeited position. I don't believe he listened to a word of it. But the moment they laid a finger on Her he loved he became pale with anger.

"I never confessed to you, dear friend, the secret thought which has been in my mind all through this business. I may as well tell it to you, now that I harbour it no more, for I fancy it was shared, in a measure, by you. I hoped, and believed that, at the last moment, before the final stroke of the clock, he would wake up suddenly, and see what an impossible sacrifice he was making, and

would come back to me and the children; and how quickly I should have forgiven him! But he went on, straight before him, to the bitter end, reckless of those he was trampling in the dust. Perhaps I was not altogether blameless, either; for had I not been the first to mention a divorce, he would never have dared to do it. At least, I think not. Had I not insisted on it, and thought more of my own feelings than of my children's future, less of love than of self-love, perhaps——. But, no! We could not have gone on as we were!

"But why worry about it all now, or go over the old ground again? If I had only known; if—but one never does. What had to be had to be, and it is all over now! I know I ought to accept the inevitable bravely, and find comfort of a sort in doing it. But I can't. I rebel against it, and am not resigned. I was out in my reckoning, and didn't know how bad it would be! But I know it now—I know it now!

"I need not write any more about it—need I, best of friends? When we meet I will tell you everything. It will comfort me to talk of it. You are the only person in all the world that I can tell everything to; for I know that, like me, you have been sorely stricken, well-nigh to death, in your tenderest point. That wretched man will never

know the full extent of the harm he has done. We who believed in him have fallen from our high estate; like him, alas! like him!

"I am coming soon, good friend, and am, as ever, yours,

SUZANNE."

Michael to Mondet:

"I did not answer your last letter, my dear friend; for what had I to say? It moved and troubled me beyond expression. I thought I had nothing left to suffer; but you opened up new depths of anguish to me, and all for nothing. No one knows better than you how the logic of events leads one on gradually, step by step. How was I to escape from it? I was bound to go on to the end. And you ought to have known I had got to a point when no consideration could stop me. It would have been cowardly to draw back. Yes; and as impossible as it was cowardly. Pious folks would have said 'He has come back to the fold.' But they would have been as wrong as I should have been had I deceived them. Any new weakness on my part would only have aggravated my crime. You see there is a special code of morals for people who have put themselves outside the

pale. It is less simple than the conventional one, and quite as difficult to act up to. One gets to know about it when one has only its unwritten laws, and would-be moral edicts, to guide one. They don't satisfy the conscience. One doesn't bow to them, as one did to the old ones, with acquiescent pride and conviction. But one obeys them because they are all we have left. I don't pretend to say that what I have done is right. I am well aware that I ought, from the very first, to have got the better of, and annihilated once for all, the feeling to which I have given way. I ought to have done so by every code of duty and right and propriety. I know it, and suffer all the more in consequence. Still, through the long series of disasters unwittingly caused by my original shortcoming, I hope I have shown myself neither a sneak nor a coward. I cling to this slight palliation of my fault more than ever, now that nothing of what is can be altered, and that I see before me the unexplored new life I have chosen, for which I have, of my own free will, surrendered the old one.

"The sacrifice has not been made without pain, as you may well imagine; and I bear the marks of it. I think as incessantly of the ruin I have caused as a criminal thinks of his crime. I fear the con-

sequences will be even graver than I anticipated; for, whatever you may think, I have reflected on the result of my action. I know you will be seeing Suzanne, for the letter you sent me mentioned her plans. Please let me know how things go with her, and what her state of mind is in her trouble. What must such a blow be to a nature like hers! I look to you to see to her, and bind up her wounds. Goodness and whole-heartedness like yours are made to help those that fall in the battle of life; and I feel I may count on your friendly offices. Believe me, it is not one of the least of my troubles that I can now do nothing for her. Alas! the hand that has inflicted the wound is forbidden to heal it! She, who was my companion for twelve years, looks on me now as a stranger, perhaps as an enemy. She would not, and could not, believe me if I said that my affection for her is the same as ever; yet that would be only the truth.

"You know me well enough to be aware that I am not a person to give way to vain regrets. What is done is done, and I regret nothing. I only deplore that anything so inevitable should have occasioned such pain. I am absolutely convinced that a separation was the only dignified solution of our unhappy situation. After what had occurred,

any attempt at a life in common would have merely been an organized falsehood. We should have had too many unpleasant associations, ill-feelings, and suspicions, to conceal from each other. The past would have always stood between us, and we should have eaten our hearts out in the effort to forget it. We have both acted with frankness and courage; and, notwithstanding the general disapproval of my conduct that you tell me of, I still think we have chosen the better part.

"I have had to modify my plans somewhat, in consequence of the painful turn things have taken. I told you I proposed leaving a considerable interval between the passing of the decree and my second marriage. Our secret, unfortunately, has not been kept as I had hoped, and my wife's lawyer made an allusion to it that everyone understood. I do not for a moment suspect Suzanne of disloyalty or of spite. It was entirely caused by her lawyer's not wishing to lose the chance of making a sensation. Anyhow, the result was not long to wait for. Two days after the suit, I received a letter from M. De Quérieux informing me that I must cease to hold any further communication with his step-daughter, and that, after the recent disclosures, any further acquaintance between us was not desirable. I replied by making an offer of imme-

diate marriage to her, and received a refusal by return of post. And so things remain. Of course, Blanche won't allow herself to be bullied by this opposition. We foresaw it, and a respectful intimation of our intentions will follow in due course. I do not think we are called on to show much deference to a step-father who hitherto has never taken the slightest notice of her, or to a mother who never really cared for her. Still, they are her parents; and here again we shall have to go through family quarrels and bothers. Not so many in this case, however. Mdme. De Quérieux. having only just awakened to the fact that she has a daughter, will soon forget that daughter's disobedience. What grieves me most in the whole matter is the annoyance and humiliation for Blanche. Her name is now in everybody's mouth, coupled with mine; and our wretched story is public property. If being reviled by slanderous tongues is painful even to a public man, what must it be to a young girl to whom modesty and privacy are so precious? Ah! how I long to carry her off from all these people, who are incapable of appreciating the nobility, generosity, and beauty of her love! But what matters what they think? It is enough that I know what she really is, just as she knows what I am. Let them abuse, humiliate,

and outlaw us as much as they like! We have each other! We shan't be there to hear their vulgar noise, and shall be happy in spite of them. I know, alas! that our happiness will not be unalloyed. It has cost us too dear for that. But it will be sweet, all the same. I want it to be so for her sake, who has given her life to me!

"I will let you know where we go, and the date of our marriage, when it is fixed. Good-bye. I know that, in spite of your disapproval, you are still my friend, as I am yours, notwithstanding all you have said and written to me.

MICHAEL TEISSIER."

X.

In spite of all the precautions taken to put public curiosity off the scent, a gaping crowd of reporters and curious idlers filled the hall at the Mayor's on the day appointed for the marriage of Blanche and Michael; and their curiosity was not altogether ungratified. The commonplace ceremony which they had come to witness differed in some important details from the usual one. The happy pair arrived together in their ordinary morning dress: Michael, in a dark coat, looking coldly grave and impassive; Blanche, in a travel-

ling cloak, with her face hidden by a thick veil. There was no one with them. The De Quérieux protested to the last against a marriage attended by such scandal as jeopardized their own position in the fashionable world. Teissier had ceased to be, in their eyes, anything more than "the man in the street" to whom every door was closed; and Michael had not chosen to invite any of his friends. The witnesses, therefore, had to be selected from among the idlers that hang about the purlieus of such places, who give their signatures for a modest tip, or for the mere pleasure of seeing their names on the Civil Register. As the couple walked in together, some remarks passed among the occupants of the benches.

"Poor little thing!" said one girl. "To be married in such a fashion!"

"Has she no parents?" asked somebody.

"Yes: she has," replied somebody else, who seemed to have special information: "a mother, who is married again—but they wouldn't come."

"It's a nice sort of wedding—this is!" said a fat dame, shaking her head. "One don't often see the like!"

Then the tittle-tattle ceased; a dead silence fell on the spectators, and a feeling of strained expectation and apprehension spread among them.

The official read the formula, in a monotonous voice, perhaps a trifle more slowly than usual, as he peeped over his spectacles at the couple before him. Michael's calm and steady "Yes" was perfectly audible, while Blanche only bowed her head. The crowd drew back, and stared at them with a look half-pity, half-curiosity, as the newly-wedded pair walked quickly out to their carriage.

"How terribly sad!" one whispered.

"Bah!" snarled someone else. "They have only got what they deserved. We needn't waste our pity on them."

Then the crowd dispersed.

Michael and Blanche sat silent in the carriage. The same thoughts, the same regrets, the same ineffable sadness, haunted both. There were no further formalities to go through, for the Church withheld its blessing from a proceeding that was sanctioned by the Law only. They belonged each other now. Every barrier had been broken down; and nothing stood between them and the life they had sighed for so long, and won, against a world in arms.

"Poor darling!" said Michael, taking Blanche's hand. "It was a terrible ordeal for you to undergo!"

Her eyes filled with tears; but she forced herself to smile, and answered, gently,—

"What does it matter?"

Her voice shook: another word, and she would have broken down.

"The world is so cruel!" said Teissier, after a little, adding,

"But we have each other."

The slender hand he held squeezed his convulsively, and a look of loving distress was visible through the thick veil, as though asking to be reassured on more things than can be solved by words.

They separated for some hours, in order that they might complete their final arrangements. Towards evening they took the train for Rouen, where they were to spend two or three days, on their way to England; for it was there they meant to pass the first few months of their new life, in some little cottage, overgrown with greenery, closed in and hidden from the gaze of the curious. They sat silent in the compartment of the railway carriage. They hoped to keep to themselves; but they failed. The train was crowded and two travellers, after hesitating a moment, got in, and took the two seats at the farther end. One of them was short and stout, with a stiff grey

moustache, who mopped his bald head with his handkerchief, as he puffed and blew. The other, who had black hair and beard, and a dark complexion, was younger, much quieter, and better-bred, in manner and appearance. The first one fidgeted about for a bit, put on and took off a velvet skull-cap, and, like a cat, was some time before he settled into a comfortable position. As soon as the train was under way, he pulled out a newspaper, and began reading it with visible interest. His varied feelings were legible in his expressive face. The telegrams, or the money market, were not to his liking. He approved the financial article. He burst out laughing at a naughty story. Suddenly, he knit his brows. There was evidently something that annoyed, irritated, and exasperated him, in turns. Finally, he could not longer contain himself, and, crumpling up the paper, he said aloud, bending towards his neighbour,—

"It's really too much of a good thing!"

The other, who was watching the starved trees, the little red-roofed houses, and meagre suburban garden-plots go by, started at being so abruptly waked from his quiet reflections, and looked round with a puzzled air of polite attention and enquiry.

"This article," explained the fat man. "See:

this article on Teissier's marriage! No, really! it's past anything you can imagine!"

"Teissier's marriage?" replied the other, in a tone of interrogation and evident ignorance.

"Yes: Teissier's marriage—Michael Teissier's. People have been talking of nothing else, you know, for months."

"Ah, yes: I remember now. But I thought it had taken place long ago?"

"Not at all! He was married this morning, and there's a long article here on it already. One can't deny that the newspapers are kept well posted up. But this article is really too much. Just listen, please, to the last few lines of it."

Leaning towards his neighbour, who put his hand behind his ear to show he was a little deaf and that his friend must speak loudly, the fat man read out in an indignant tone:

"After all, this tragic breakdown, this absolute surrender of everything that he held dear, this reckless flight with the woman he loves, is, perhaps the noblest act of Michael Teissier's life. It may seem strange to say so; but it is not meant to be paradoxical."

"Of course not!" growled the reader, as he stopped to vent his anger: "not the least paradoxical!"

He went on again:

"Let us consider for a moment. Our anæmic age is almost totally devoid of natural instincts, and of love. Teissier has been only actuated by the instinct of love."

"That's pretty strong—eh?"

"If our readers doubt it, we would ask them to measure the strength of his feeling by what it has cost him to indulge it. Those who have seen him in his home cannot doubt but that he had deep, warm, family affections. But he sacrificed them. He was ambitious, and the ball seemed to be at his foot. He gave up his ambition. He loved the right. But he has put it out of his power to do it. He valued the good opinion of his fellow-men. He has thrown his reputation to the dogs, who will take good care that not much of it is left. Thus we see that self-seeking, at all events, had no place in his folly. I repeat, no act of Michael Teissier's was ever more disinterested. He is an honest man, and he has continued to be one in spite of his folly. Let us leave him to be condemned by those commonplace moralists who judge from bare facts, without caring to enquire into causes, or without taking character into consideration. When one of the most promising careers of late years is shipwrecked, as his has been, it only remains for men of good feeling and good

sense to wish 'God-speed' to their less fortunate brother. Those who judge him less charitably may be quite easy in their minds. Teissier carries in himself his own worst punishment. He will never be happy."

Michael and Blanche had both involuntarily leant forward to catch what was being read out. Each word was a stab to them. When it was over they both lay back again, avoiding to look at each other, and gazed out of the window at the green fields. What did it matter what people said about them? They knew beforehand they would be abused and disgraced. Still, brave it out as they would, in their innermost conscience a little voice whispered they were in the wrong.

"Is such stuff credible?" asked the fat man, crumpling up the newspaper once more. "Is it to be believed?"

The other, who probably had not heard quite distinctly, shook his head, reprehendingly, without speaking.

"'Pon my word," continued the other, "what fools those Press men are! And the man that wrote that more so than any of them. 'Instinct!' and 'Love!' What on earth does he mean? By Jove! when you've children, Instinct and Love

ought to teach you to be a good father—oughtn't they?"

"Naturally."

"Why, here's a man, a sober, middle-aged, man, well thought of, occupying a great position, a coming Cabinet Minister, and believed in by the country. He comes across a young girl,—quite a young girl,—falls in love with her, like any other booby, and, forthwith, sacrifices family, position, duty, everything, for her. Then they tell us, forsooth, that he is only acting from 'Instinct' and 'Love'!"

The other, whose mind moved slowly, and was not easily excited, contented himself by murmuring,

"Yes, indeed: there's no question of it: he has behaved abominably."

Michael looked up angrily, for a moment, and then subsided into his place by the window.

"You see, my dear sir," continued the first speaker, who evidently meant to thresh the subject out, "it's always so with these goody-goody folks. Teissier was the saint of the Chamber. I, personally, always distrusted him, in spite of his popularity. I don't myself believe in saints. Saints and sinners are all very much of a muchness. None of us is perfect. I don't mean anything

personal, you understand; for I have never had the pleasure of seeing you before on this line, though I go up to town by it once a week. I have a little bit of property at Poissy. But I daresay you are like the rest of us,—myself included,—we like our little fun every now and then,—and no harm to anybody. But to go on like that! Good heavens!"

He put on as serious an expression as was compatible with his jovial temperament and his own merry reminiscences. The other, who had been listening with the seriousness of a judge, at last took up the word.

"You are right," he said, sententiously, "quite right. I entirely agree with you. The article you read out is absurd. But the modern tendency is to sophisticate the simplest questions. Yet, no matter how those gentry try to muddle things up, life is simple enough. Right is Right, and Wrong is Wrong. Do what is right, and eschew what is wrong,—and there you are!"

The fat traveller agreed vociferously.

"Provided one has a little bit of fun sometimes," he said, laughing; and then he added, gravely,—

"It's curious how soon honest folks agree on important questions. Here you and I meet accidentally, and begin to talk about this matter; and

we don't require much argument to be of one mind about it."

"There's nothing to argue about. The case was a bad one, and without any extenuating circumstances."

"Just so: it was perfectly plain sailing. Here was a man who had neglected every duty, and behaved atrociously. The case was gone into, and the Court pronounced him to be a rascal."

Michael had turned deathly pale, and would scarcely have restrained himself but that Blanche's loving eyes were on him. The voice of their conscience was telling them the same, in less outspoken, but just as plain, words. The second traveller said, quietly,

"Yes: he was a rascal."

"And that was the opinion of everyone—the unanimous opinion. No one attempted to defend Teissier, whose ears must often have tingled; for every decent person in our set blamed him, just as you and I have done. I defy him to try and get back into the House! He wouldn't get a single vote."

"I think you exaggerate, my dear sir. There are always people ready to overlook the sins of their neighbours, in order, no doubt, that the same clemency may be extended to themselves, on

occasion. The article you read out is a proof of it."

"What, I ask you, can a newspaper article prove? It is only the expression of an individual opinion; or written, by some feather-headed fellow, merely to attract attention. It means nothing. The public conscience is the final judge, my dear sir. For, say what we will, there is one, as is plainly to be seen when such cases as these arise."

"I should like to think you were right."

"I am right. Don't let there be any mistake about it. The journalist in question and his congeners may confuse the issue as much as they like: they will not alter the verdict of the public conscience. It is always sound, and does not bother itself about fine distinctions. It's a comfort to find it is so, after all the nonsense one reads in books and papers."

"You seem to have a high opinion of the public, sir. I am less of an optimist; but that does not much matter. We are agreed on the principal point, entirely agreed."

The whistle of the engine, as it approached Poissy, interrupted the conversation. The fat man carefully folded the papers he had crumpled, and prepared to get out. Seeing that his fellow-traveller was doing the same, he exclaimed,

"Are you getting out, too?"

"Yes."

"You never told me."

"We were talking on more interesting subjects."

"Not at all. I'm delighted, and hope we may improve our acquaintance."

As soon as the train stopped, they got out, after making manners as to who should go first; and off they went, the fat man still gesticulating, the thin one, who had a slight stoop, listening drily.

Blanche and Michael were alone at last. They had not lost a word of the conversation. They had been gazing, seemingly, out of the window but the low lines of hills, and the rivers, rushed by them unseen and unheard. They were listening, less to the voices of the two strangers, than to that inner voice once silenced by passion, but now triumphantly reasserting itself.

The look they gave each other was sad and searching, with just a touch of doubt and distrust. They could not tell each other their thoughts. Words could not express them. Some things are best left unsaid: once uttered, they are never forgotten. They were silent for a minute or two, until the train started again; but they could guess a good deal from each other's eyes. Then Blanche

rose, and seated herself close to her husband's side, with an anxious, beseeching expression.

"Is it true," she asked, in a trembling voice,—"is it true you will never be happy?"

He took her hands, and drew her to him, as if to protect and defend her.

"Happy, my darling?" he answered. "I am happy,—so happy!"

The lying words scorched his lips; for at this very moment, when he felt, for the first time, that the woman he loved was his, wholly his, and that he could carry her off where he listed,—for the whole world lay before him and his love,—at this very moment, there rose between him and Her a vision of the hearts he had broken, the hearth he had quenched, the wrecking of his own career, and the bitter price he had paid for his happiness. He felt daunted, and unlike his old self, in face of the horrid spectre. All heart for joy and love had gone out of him,—the heart of former days.

Lest Blanche should guess, he pressed her to him, convulsively, as she laid her head on his shoulder, and whispered,—

"Yes: I am happy! Are you?"

"Yes: perfectly happy! I love you, and can think of nothing else!"

The last words told their tale; and the little voice whispered triumphantly, to Michael, "It is false! It is false!"

As they rush on towards the dim, unknown future of their choice, they already seem to feel in the air around them the shadow of a deception.

Distrust of each other, and of themselves, will kill their joy; and the ghost of memories they cannot lay will haunt them until the end.

THE END.

Miss Helen Jane
Gillespie

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